Look, Mother! The Sheep Have Devoured the Wolves!

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/13832298.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Categories:	F/F, F/M, M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationships:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter, Bedelia Du Maurier/Hannibal Lecter, Alana Bloom/Margot Verger, Anthony Dimmond/Bedelia Du Maurier
Characters:	Bedelia Du Maurier, Hannibal Lecter, Will Graham, Alana Bloom, Margot Verger, Mason Verger, Morgan Verger, Jack Crawford, Anthony Dimmond, Freddie Lounds, Chiyoh (Hannibal)
Additional Tags:	Alpha/Beta/Omega Dynamics, Surrogacy, Omega Will Graham, Alpha Hannibal Lecter, Touch-Starved, Sexual Tension, Contracts, Marriage Contracts, Affairs, Voyeurism, Public Display of Affection, Semi-Public Sex, Murder, Cannibalism, Mating Cycles/In Heat, Mpreg, Contractual Exhibitionism, Contractual Voyeurism, Exhibitionism, Masks, Collars, Breeding, Breeding Kink, Biting, Rutting, Frottage, Blow Jobs, Knotting, References to Knotting
Language:	English
Collections:	Hannigram Bonanza, Hannibal, Lexical Personal reads, Hannibal Hits
Stats:	Published: 2018-03-01 Completed: 2018-05-04 Words: 102,934 Chapters: 17/17

Look, Mother! The Sheep Have Devoured the Wolves!

by HigherMagic

Summary

Hannibal and Bedelia are married, but unable to have children. At Margot's insistence, Hannibal agrees to meet the Omega that was a surrogate for her and Alana. Will is rough-edged, unrefined, and everything Hannibal shouldn't desire. This arrangement promises to be clean, and simple. Of course, nothing concerning Will Graham is ever simple.

Notes

Alright, you guys locked and loaded?

If anyone has read my ABO TWD fics, I mention a social mechanism called 'playing', or 'play-fighting'. The best example of this is "Best Laid Plans", if anyone is curious. Essentially it involves the kind of placation and games in "The First of his Kind", and I'll go into more detail about it in the fic, but basically it's the social practice of asserting dominance over an Omega and getting them hormonally ready for heat. It's an 100% consensual practice in this fic.

There's a brief mention of abortion in this chapter for those who are sensitive to it. Feel free to message me on here or Tumblr if you have questions and I'll explain before you guys start reading.

Enjoy!

Chapter 1

"Doctor Lecter, Doctor Du Maurier. Please, have a seat."

Hannibal already knows that it's going to be bad news. Their obstetrician, unfortunately, isn't good at keeping her expression schooled when it comes to sharing test results, either good or bad. Bedelia notices too – her face is drawn and tense, and she has one leg folded over the other and her foot keeps rolling like she's trying to crack her ankle. She does that when she's tense.

"Okay, I'll just get right down to it," Doctor Hanscomb says, opening up the file. She sighs and shakes her head. "I'm afraid, Doctor Du Maurier, that according to these results, your womb is what we'd call an 'inhospitable environment'. It looks like the chances of conceiving naturally for you are in the low tens."

Bedelia presses her lips together. Hannibal reaches out and takes her hand, squeezing her fingers loosely. "And…my husband?" she asks.

"Doctor Lecter, your results came back normally," Doctor Hanscomb says, closing the folder and settling her hands on top of it. Hannibal hums, looking over at Bedelia again. There's a spark of frustration in her eyes.

"What are our options?"

"Well, you never know. By all means, continue to have intercourse as normal. There's always a chance, like I said before. Other than that, we can try I.V.F." Bedelia swallows, nodding along. "Then there's the option of surrogacy, or, of course, adoption."

Hannibal knows without looking at his wife that that final option is unthinkable. Bedelia would not tolerate raising someone else's child. Nor would he, in all honesty. Adoption is very rare amongst couples where one parent is an Alpha – the instincts are too strong to abide the genetic insult of raising another person's child. As a result, most of the people who adopt are women, or Omega-women pairs.

"I wish it was better news," Doctor Hanscomb says kindly. In truth, Hannibal expected something like this to be the result. They've been trying for almost a year, and he has never been able to catch the right *something* in Bedelia's scent that meant she was fertile, no matter what point in the ovulation cycle she was.

He has never been all that inclined towards the idea of fathering children. As an Alpha, he's naturally predisposed to want to sire offspring and carry on his genetic line, but children are loud, messy, and chaotic. But Bedelia wants a baby, and Hannibal is obliged as her mate and partner to try and give her one. Anything to keep her hands busy and her mind occupied.

He smiles at their obstetrician and looks over at Bedelia. She looks defeated, in a way Hannibal has rarely seen her. "Thank you for your time," she says, and looks back at

Hannibal. She gives him a wan, tired smile, squeezes his hand, and gets to her feet. Hannibal follows suit.

"Let me know if you want to try any medical treatments," Doctor Hanscomb says, standing and shaking Hannibal's hand. "There have been a lot of promising leaps forward in the way of fertility treatments. This isn't a closed book."

"Thank you," Hannibal replies, and puts a hand on Bedelia's back as he guides her out of the office. She sighs, taking her coat from the back of her chair, and puts it on as they walk out of the hospital and towards Hannibal's car.

"An 'inhospitable environment'," Bedelia murmurs as they get in the car and Hannibal starts it, heading back to his home. She presses her lips together and sighs through her nose, shaking her head. "I suppose that's it, then."

"What do you mean?" Hannibal asks.

"Neither of us will abide with trying chemical methods to change me," Bedelia says, and Hannibal nods in agreement. "And I sense adoption is out of the question."

Hannibal nods, humming. "We can continue trying the natural way," he offers, "as Doctor Hanscomb said."

"Yes," Bedelia says, her voice far away and thoughtful. She turns her head to look at Hannibal, and Hannibal can feel her eyes on the side of his face, although he must keep his gaze on the road as he drives. "What do you think about surrogacy?"

"I suppose that would depend on the matter you want to pursue it."

She smiles, and reaches out to put a hand on his over the gear shift. Hannibal spreads his fingers to allow hers to interlace. Her ring feels cold between his knuckles and he lifts her hand to kiss it. "You're always so careful with how you say things," she says, something like affection in her voice.

They have been married for many years. Hannibal proposed to her shortly after retiring from his surgical career to pursue healing of the mind. Still, despite their years together, they maintain almost wholly separate lives. Bedelia has her own home where she conducts her practice, and they spend weekends together, and the occasional night when they want to lay together as man and wife. They both enjoy their solitude.

"I want an Omega child," she says after another moment of companionable silence.

Hannibal nods. He knows that much already. "That will require an Omega as part of the equation," he replies. She hums. "You sound like you have one already in mind."

"Perhaps," she says, smiling. Hannibal raises his eyebrows. "Do you recall Anthony?"

Anthony. Dimmond. Hannibal had met him for the first time many years ago, at a gathering they'd held when Bedelia had gotten her new practice. Since then, he has become a familiar

face in their immediate circle of friends. Hannibal suspects that he and Bedelia are having an affair. He can sometimes catch traces of his scent in her hair.

"Anthony," he repeats.

"He's attractive, young, intelligent, and unmated," Bedelia says.

Hannibal hums. "I think it would be better to choose someone to whom neither of us had any prior engagement," he says, and looks over to her to see what her reaction is to that. Her expression remains unchanged – a carefully calculated move on her part. "Less chance of emotional attachment."

Bedelia makes a soft, reluctant sound of acquiescence. She pulls her hand away from Hannibal's and settles them both on her lap. "That may take a while," she says.

Hannibal smiles. "I'm in no hurry, my love," he says.

"We would have to find an Omega willing to bear young for us, and then let the child go when the time came," she says airily, looking forward again. "And coax him into a heat. Which means you shall have to play with him." She looks back at Hannibal again, one eyebrow raised. "And you can promise no emotional attachment would form?"

"I am confident in that respect, yes," Hannibal replies. "It's hard to bond with a breeding animal."

She huffs, her smile widening. Her shoulders lose their tension. "Very well," she says, quietly agreeing. "I shall come to dinner at your home every night, and I will bring those I find, and you will bring some of yours. If we agree, we will proceed."

"Excellent," Hannibal says, pulling into a free parking space next to Bedelia's car. She had driven to his home so they could ride to the doctor's office together. He leaves the engine idling, since he has a therapy session scheduled later and must return to his office.

She reaches over and cups his cheek, leaning in for a chaste kiss. "Goodbye, Hannibal," she says, and gets out of his car and into her own. He waits until she leaves, and then follows her out of the parking area and back onto the main road.

"Doctor Lecter, I'm so sorry. Alana will be by to pick him up in a minute, I just -."

"Nonsense, Margot. Please, come in."

Margot gives him a joyful, pleased smile, shifting the weight of her son on her hip as she steps into Hannibal's office. She walks over to the chair he reserves for patients and sits down, the child sitting heavy but content in her arms.

"He's growing quickly," Hannibal notes, smiling when the baby gives a tiny shriek, fat arms flailing around before settling against his chest. He's a lovely child, an Alpha, with pretty blue eyes and dark, curling hair.

"Yes, like a weed," Margot says, smiling down with such abject love and joy at her son as he settles in her arms, eyes going heavy-lidded. "Alana's running late, and I couldn't bear to be away from him today, so I brought him with me. I hope that's alright."

"Of course," Hannibal says with a polite nod, taking his own seat and pulling his notebook into his lap. "Your son is a great source of happiness for you. Your wife, as well." He smiles at her. "This has been an incredible year for you, Margot."

"Yes," she says with another nod. She looks leaps and bounds better than the scared, broken child he had begun treating just over two years ago. Hannibal recalls her brother, how he'd tortured and abused her so mercilessly. She'd been at his beck and call for years, since their father died and left Mason as the only heir to his fortune, with the command that only a male heir would be eligible for future wealth and prosperity. When Mason had so unfortunately passed a little less than a year ago, Hannibal had feared for her mental wellbeing.

"Tell me," he says, opening his notebook, "has the boy's mother been giving you any trouble?"

"None at all," Margot says with a happy smile. She tilts her head to one side, one corner of her mouth twitching up in a playful, childish grin. "Why do you ask?"

Hannibal shrugs, the picture of nonchalance. "I'm simply curious," he replies. "Your family has money and means – it's too easy to exploit, especially when one could argue you owe him your entire livelihood."

"He merely provided the egg, Doctor Lecter," Margot says, mischievous. Hannibal raises his eyebrows. "He didn't carry Morgan. Alana did."

"So…his egg, your brother's sperm, and a third party as the host," Hannibal says, smiling. "Sounds complicated."

"Well, it's not like either of us could provoke him into heat," Margot replies lightly. "And I wouldn't have asked him to…sleep with my brother." Her nose wrinkles in distaste. "I wouldn't wish that on anyone."

"This Omega was a friend of Alana's, correct?" Hannibal asks.

"Yes," Margot replies. "They were friends, before she and I met." Margot cocks her head to one side, her smile sly and her eyes bright with humor. "You've never asked about him before," she adds. Hannibal smiles at her. "Are you getting broody, Doctor Lecter?"

Hannibal huffs a laugh. Over his time with Margot, he has become accustomed to her sense of humor. He considers her a friend, bonded over her suffering under the hands of her brother, and after seeing her rise from the ashes of her former life, he cannot help thinking of her as like a close friend, or a sister. He delights in seeing her happy and free.

"My wife and I have been trying for a child for some time now," he says. "We are considering a surrogate. She wants an Omega child."

Margot's eyes light up. "Well, if you'd like, I can give you his contact information. I still have it."

"I'm not sure that's wise," Hannibal replies. "We wouldn't want him to think that he was only useful for one thing. And, forgive me, without giving away too many details – his role in the whole thing would be very different from what he did for you."

"I'm aware of how Omegas work, Doctor Lecter," she replies coolly, lifting her chin. "And I don't think it's offensive to ask."

"How would you react if a strange Alpha approached you and asked you to bear a child for him?" Hannibal replies, raising his eyebrows.

She laughs. "I suppose you have a point." She pauses, biting her lower lip. "But if you change your mind, ask. Or I'll have Alana ask him, next time she sees him."

Hannibal smiles. There's a knock at the door and they both rise, and Hannibal opens the door and greets Alana with a welcoming smile. She smiles back, pleased to see him. They've been friends for a long time, and Alana was a student of Hannibal's when she was pursuing her own degree. "Hello, Hannibal," she says with a warm smile, and then Hannibal moves to one side so that Margot can greet her wife. She kisses Alana chastely on the lips and hands Morgan off to her.

"Alana," she says brightly. "I think you should introduce Doctor Lecter to Will."

Hannibal huffs, a good-natured smile on his face. "You're tenacious," he says, and Margot grins at him.

"Will?" Alana repeats, raising an eyebrow as she settles Morgan more comfortably on her hip. "Why?"

Margot smiles. "Doctor Lecter and his wife are looking for a surrogate," she says brightly. "I think Will would suit them nicely."

Alana's other eyebrow joins the first, and she looks at Hannibal with a mix of amusement and interest. "Is that so?"

"I mentioned it in passing," Hannibal replies. "Your wife got the idea in her head."

"She's hard to dissuade," Alana says with a fond smile. Margot laughs, covering her mouth with the tips of her fingers. Alana's smile softens, affectionate and loving when she looks at Margot. "I can mention it to him, though. He volunteered for us readily enough." She looks back at Hannibal. "I think you'd like Will, Hannibal."

"Oh?" Hannibal asks.

Alana's smile turns secretive and sly, much like her wife's. "I don't want to give anything away," she says proudly. "I can already see you're interested."

And perhaps she is right. Hannibal is running out of protests. "Perhaps I should invite you both to dinner tomorrow night," he says, straightening up. "And, if Will is amenable, you shall bring him as a guest, so Bedelia and I can meet him."

"Excellent!" Margot chirps, clapping her hands together. "Oh, it'll be so much fun!"

Alana laughs, rolling her eyes, and kisses Margot's cheek once more. "Alright. I need to head out. Have fun, you two," she says, and leaves the office. Hannibal shuts the door behind her and huffs, shaking his head at Margot's eager grin.

"It's a wonder I get anything done, with all the women in my life," he says with an over-dramatic wave of his hand, and heads back to his chair.

"Oh yes, I'm sure you'll suffer *so* much," Margot replies, taking her seat once again. She folds one leg over the other and gives Hannibal another bright, child-like smile. Hannibal cannot find it in himself to be too aggravated, seeing her so happy. Her joy is infectious. "This is classic economics, Doctor Lecter," she adds, and Hannibal cocks his head to one side. "Give a little, get a little. I was given a great opportunity and a remarkably good twist of fate, and now I pass it along."

Hannibal hums. "Alright, Madame Matchmaker," he says, teasing. He opens the book and settles back down to their normal therapy session. "Shall we?"

"Hannibal, I invited an Omega to dinner tonight. I met him at the college. I'd like you to meet him."

"Very well," Hannibal says with an accepting nod. Bedelia smiles, taking a sip of her wine. "And I have invited Margot and Alana to dinner tomorrow night. They'll be bringing the Omega who was a surrogate for them. Apparently it is imperative that I meet this man."

Bedelia pauses, raising her eyebrows. "You work fast," she says.

Hannibal smiles at her. "As do you, my love," he replies. Bedelia is, in laymen's terms, a control freak. They both are. Hannibal can hardly argue about the power exchange – after all, if they are to continue down the route of an Omega surrogate, Hannibal will have to go through most of the interactions. He will have to, essentially, court the Omega, play with him, placate and bond with him to a degree that he will go into heat. Through this, Bedelia is essentially powerless. She cannot force Hannibal to play with an Omega he does not desire.

She brings him sacrifices to his altar, and Hannibal can consume or discard them as he sees fit.

"Tell me about this Omega," she says.

"I'm afraid I don't know much about him," Hannibal replies. "I know he is friends with Alana, that they have known each other for a long time. In that regards, I trust his intelligence and his personality well enough. Alana is not friends with just anyone."

Bedelia hums. "So you don't know what he looks like, or what he does for a living, or anything like that?" she asks. Hannibal shakes his head. "How out of character for you."

"Yes," Hannibal concedes. He resists the urge to tell her that if she knew Margot and Alana like he did, she would have been similarly unable to disagree. "Tell me about your Omega," he says.

Bedelia smiles. "His name is Adrian," she says. "He's a student of the arts. He likes opera and plays the violin." Hannibal raises his eyebrows. "He's unmated, attractive -."

"How old is he?" Hannibal asks.

Bedelia hums. "Twenty-three."

So young. Hannibal frowns. "I'm…surprised," he says, slowly. "How did you come to meet him?"

"He attended one of my lectures," Bedelia replies airily. "After the lecture, he approached me to ask questions about the subject. I was doing a lecture on abnormal psychology in Omegas." She raises her eyes and meets Hannibal's. "We spoke for a long while, after that."

"Does he know the nature of this dinner?" Hannibal asks.

She smiles. "Yes. He was quite eager to meet you."

"I can't imagine why," Hannibal replies.

Bedelia hums, shaking her head. "Humility doesn't suit you, Hannibal," she says affectionately. "You attract the…oddities."

Yes, he supposes that's true.

Hannibal recovers quickly, and gifts her with a smile. He circles the kitchen counter and rests a hand lightly on her hair, kissing the top of her head. "I'll serve lamb," he says, and she nods, a tightness to her mouth and a flash in her eyes that she always gets when she wonders about the legitimacy of the meat he claims to be making. "I'm excited to meet him."

"Yes," she replies airily, and finishes her wine. "I imagine you are."

Adrian, as it turns out, is quite lovely. He possesses the usual aesthetic charm most Omegas are blessed with. He avoids eye contact with Hannibal out of respect, and brings a bottle of wine as a gift when Bedelia answers the door for him. He's slender, small of stature, blond

and green-eyed. When Hannibal serves the food, he smiles brightly and digs into it eagerly, the picture of decorum and respect. He reminds Hannibal of the Omegas and daughters that people used to throw into his path when he was an unmarried man – and, sometimes, they still do, under the pretense of 'knowing what Alphas are like' and 'it can be an arrangement'.

He is also, Hannibal finds out, utterly boring. Hannibal looks at him and sees a fine piece of china, taken out to show off at dinner parties and altogether shiny and two-dimensional. When Hannibal looks at him, he shows his neck in a way that's almost whorish. He laughs too long at Hannibal's jokes, and fawns over Bedelia's paintings and research like he's trying to earn extra credit in a class from his professor.

Sycophant. Suck-up. Hannibal is placated and appeased by his behavior, but it's too easy. He's polite and well-groomed, fine and young. Too young. Too innocent. Hannibal thinks about putting his teeth in the Omega's neck and his stomach turns with something like revulsion.

He smells too sweet, like he's approaching heat already. He keeps touching his neck and then trying to touch Hannibal. Hannibal doesn't know if Bedelia is aware of it at all – women, unfortunately, lack the genetic makeup and sense of smell to understand things like heat, rut, and the fine-tuned workings of Alpha-Omega interactions. There are no Alpha or Omega women, after all.

He bids Adrian a good night at the end of dinner, more abruptly than he'd intended, but too aggravated by the Omega's behavior to care all that much. Adrian seems surprised, but submits to it with a meek nod, thanks him for dinner, and Bedelia escorts him out.

Hannibal sighs, drumming his knuckles against the arm rest of his chair, his eyes on the centerpiece as Bedelia comes back into the dining room and takes a seat.

"So," she says, sounding amused, "that's a 'No', I take it."

"He's a *child*," Hannibal says with a dismissive wave. "You may as well have asked me to mount a teenager."

"I thought his innocence would appeal to you," Bedelia replies. "Clearly, I was wrong."

Hannibal hums. In all fairness, he's not sure what exactly *would* attract him to an Omega, or another woman. Bedelia was a rare find, someone who sees the darkness in him and, while she fears it, she does not recoil from it. Bedelia was the first person, women *or* Omega, that Hannibal would have considered mating with. Since their marriage he has never found much interest beyond vague sexual attraction in anyone else he has met. Even then, it tends to go away as soon as they open their mouths. Such is the unfortunate personality trait of his that is attraction to someone's mind more than their bodies, or the sexual satisfaction they can bring.

"Perhaps your Omega will prove more promising," Bedelia says airily, taking a sip of her wine.

Hannibal nods, considering it. "Perhaps," he responds. He is certainly more confident about Alana's recommendations than a psychology student who throws themselves at the

opportunity to have a child for someone simply based off their name.

He is curious about this 'Will'. He wonders if he will live up to Hannibal's expectations.

Hannibal looks up at the knock on his front door. He hums, checking the time. It's ten minutes before Alana and Margot are due to arrive. Alana used to come early to his dinners, but since acquiring a wife and child, she normally runs late. This would be a new, happy surprise.

Bedelia rises and goes to the door. Hannibal checks the roasting 'pork' loin in the oven, and straightens when he hears a voice. Not Alana's, or Margot's – male. Soft and low. He keeps his attention on the food deliberately so as not to appear too eager.

"Hannibal," Bedelia says, drawing his attention. Hannibal looks over his shoulder, catches Bedelia's blonde waves and a darker shadow at her side. "Allow me to introduce Will Graham."

Hannibal turns, and his eyes meet the Omega's. They're a bright blue-green, almost the same color as Morgan Verger's eyes. It seems the child inherited his dark curls as well. He's wearing glasses, and a thick coat, his hands deep in his pockets. Bedelia is holding a bottle of port in her hands, and she sets it down on the kitchen island.

"Guess I'm early," Will says, his voice quiet, and Hannibal smiles.

"Please, sit," he says, and gestures to one of the bar stools that he keeps when Bedelia is here. She likes to sit and watch him cook, the same way people can't look away from a traffic collision on the side of the road. Will presses his lips together, nodding in thanks, and takes a seat next to Bedelia. "May I offer you something to drink?"

"Sure," Will replies. He has his eyes lowered, but not out of deference. He seems jittery. Nervous, but not nervous all at once. Hannibal pours him a glass of wine and he takes it, fingers flat on the bottom of the glass as he twirls it around.

He looks up, meets Hannibal's eyes first, then Bedelia's. He clears his throat. "You, ah, have a lovely home," he says, awkward, his mouth turning into a lopsided smile. Hannibal hums. Will sucks in a breath through his jaws, scenting the air, and his brow furrows. He can likely smell the fact that Bedelia is not here too often.

Hannibal takes a moment to admire him. He's beautiful, there's no denying that. Hannibal would guess him to be in his late thirties, a little older than Alana. He has a thin, dark beard covering his cheeks and jaw, hiding any mating bites that might be there already. His shoulders are broad, hinting at a manual trade. He's solid, and his hands are pale and callused.

Bedelia takes her own wine glass and Hannibal turns his attention back to the roast. "My husband tells me you're friends with Doctor Bloom," she says. Will gives a hum of

agreement. "What do you do for a living, Will?"

"I, ah, teach psychoanalysis for the Behavioral Science Unit in the FBI," Will replies. Hannibal raises his eyebrows, opening the oven door and sliding on his mitts to take the roast out. "Sometimes I assist the director with criminal profiles."

Bedelia hums. Hannibal can feel her eyes on his back. "Any particular flavor of criminal?" she asks.

Hannibal turns and sets the roast down in time to see Will nod. His eyes flash up, meet Hannibal's, then dart away to Bedelia's elbow. "Serial killers," he says.

Hannibal can't help the pleased and surprised sound he lets out, drawing Will's gaze again. "An honorable profession," he says. Bedelia nods. "And, forgive me; surprising, given your biology."

Will smiles tightly, like he's heard this kind of thing before. His hand tightens on his wine glass and he lifts it to take a sip. "Murder doesn't stop for an ovulation cycle, Doctor Lecter," he replies. Hannibal smiles.

"No, I suppose it doesn't."

There's another knock at the door, and Bedelia gives him a warning look, before she stands to greet Margot and Alana. Hannibal hears their voices as the women engage in quiet, intimate conversation. He looks at Will, curious when he sees Will's head moving back and forth, trying to take in every detail while studiously avoiding Hannibal's eyes.

"Not a fan of eye contact, are you?" he asks.

Will shakes his head. "Eyes are distracting," he murmurs. "You see too much. You don’t see enough. And…" He bites his lip, squares his jaw, and lifts his gaze as though to prove to Hannibal that he can. "It's hard to focus when you're thinking 'Oh, those whites are really white' or 'He must have hepatitis' or 'Is that a burst vein?'." Hannibal's smile widens, and Will swallows and drops his gaze again. "So, yeah, I try to avoid eyes whenever possible."

He swallows harshly and takes another sip of wine. Margot and Alana come into the kitchen, Bedelia bringing up the rear, and Will lifts his head. The nervousness melts from him at once, replaced with affection and joy, and he stands in time for Alana to come over and embrace him. He puts his nose to her neck, breathing in deeply, and then hugs Margot – less intimately, but just as affectionate.

"Sorry we're late," Alana says, taking off her gloves. "Traffic was a nightmare."

"You're just in time," Hannibal replies, gesturing to the roast. "Please, take your seats. I'll bring everything in shortly."

"It smells wonderful, Hannibal," Alana says, delighted as Hannibal takes the cover off of the roast. He smiles at her, slicing the roast into thick cuts and dividing it out. Bedelia has her oysters and salad in front of her, and when everyone is served, he sits and bids them eat.

Will's eyes are on Bedelia's plate. He bites his lower lip and nods to it. "Pescatarian?" he asks.

Bedelia smiles tightly. "I don't like to eat anything that once had a nervous system," she says.

Will tilts his head to one side, but doesn't respond. He takes a first bite of the roast and lets out a happy, surprised sound. "Wow," he says, and looks to Alana as though for confirmation that what he's eating is real. He smiles at Hannibal. "This is excellent."

"I'm very careful about what I put into my body," Hannibal replies lightly, taking his own bite. The meat is pink and juicy, flavored with rosemary and mint. He hums around his mouthful and Will's cheeks turn pink. He ducks his head again.

"Where did you learn to cook?" he asks.

"I'm self-taught," Hannibal replies, smiling. Will's eyes are on his hands, as though enthralled as Hannibal cuts his meat and when he lifts it to his mouth to eat. Hannibal swallows back his purr whenever he catches Will looking. He knows Alana, Margot, and Bedelia won't hear it, but Will can. He must be careful not to give too much away.

Will regards him for another moment, before he swallows. "Cooking is an art form," he says. "One of the most selfish ones there is."

"How do you figure that?" Margot asks. It must be strange, to sit in a room full of psychiatrists and criminal profilers. Hannibal wonders how much of this conversation might be had without anyone saying a single word. Will, it seems, can communicate whole sentences with a twitch of his mouth or a clench of his jaw.

Will shrugs one shoulder. "Painters, writers, musicians…they hardly perform just for themselves," he says. "It demands an audience."

"And do you not see yourself as an audience member in this meal?" Bedelia asks.

Will shakes his head. "The food would be fine whether any of us were here or not," he replies. Hannibal smiles into his wine glass and Will meets his gaze for a brief moment, before he ducks his eyes down. Unlike Adrian, Will does not defer to him to placate him, or appease him, but simply because he naturally cannot hold eye contact with an Alpha. His strength and his weakness are intertwined as intimately as lovers.

Hannibal finds himself growing more and more intrigued by the minute.

"One might argue that murder is another performance," he says. Bedelia lets out a low, tense hum, and takes a long drink of wine. "Sometimes performed with great extravagance."

"A tasteless extravagance," Will replies. "It runs the risk of too many frills."

"Do you have a problem with taste, Will?" Hannibal asks.

Will's jaw clenches. He sets his teeth together, bares them just enough that Hannibal can see their edges, and turns his attention back to his food. "My thoughts are not often tasty," he replies. "Such is the life."

"How long have you worked for the FBI?" Bedelia asks.

Will shrugs one shoulder. "Years," he replies.

"He's very gifted," Alana says. "He can see things in a murder no one else can. He… understands them. The motivations behind a crime scene."

"I just read the evidence," Will says defensively, as though Alana meant the words as a warning. Alana shares a look with him, and puts a gentle hand on his arm. He sighs, smiling tightly at her, and relaxes. "How long have you been a psychiatrist?" he asks Bedelia.

Bedelia smiles. "Since before you were a man, most likely," she replies airily. Will's mouth twitches and he huffs a breath.

"And you, Doctor Lecter?"

"Many, many years," Hannibal replies. "But before that, I was a surgeon."

Will pauses, looking up. "Do you find the mind that much more interesting?" he asks.

"It is the mind that gives us the power through which we accomplish anything," Hannibal replies, smiling. "Art, and music. Even murder."

Will smiles. It's a small, genuine expression, like Hannibal's answer has pleased him.

They continue with dinner. Hannibal learns that Will was born in Louisiana, to an Omega and Alpha before his father remarried after his Alpha's death. Will never knew the man who sired him, apparently, and feels no loss telling that story. He tells Hannibal of his dogs, and the fact that he's enrolled in a course to become a full Agent with the FBI. Throughout it all, Will only shows his neck when he turns to speak with Margot and Alana. He doesn't touch his neck except to scratch at it when he's uncomfortable. He eats and drinks without complaint, does not give out accolades or praise unless it's deserved. It's so different from the shiny toy of Omega Bedelia tried to show him before, that Hannibal cannot help compare Adrian again to the other Omegas and women that have been thrust in his path by expectant mothers, hoping to catch his eye.

Will doesn't try to catch his eye. He simply is, gleaming like a diamond in the heart of a mountain. Hannibal finds himself compelled to dig at the stone around him and try to find all of his rough and broken edges. He wants to make Will shine, and thinks about how pretty he'd look with his eyes all gold and the sweat of heat-flush on his skin.

Dinner ends, and Hannibal invites them to a glass of port in the study, but Will refuses, citing that he has to tend to his dogs. Hannibal accepts it cordially, strangely sorrowful at the notion that he will be parted from Will's company so soon.

Then, he checks the clock, and sees that five hours have flown by while in Will's company. Curious.

He walks Will to the door and waits for him to don his coat. Will hesitates, his eyes over Hannibal's shoulder as though to check if they're being watched, or followed. Then he clears his throat, his shoulders up to protect his neck, his eyes on Hannibal's chest.

"Alana told me what this is about," he says. Hannibal nods, unsurprised. "If you and Doctor Du Maurier want to see me again, just let her know, and she'll tell me."

Hannibal cocks his head to one side. "You want Alana to continue to act as a buffer?" he asks.

Will clenches his jaw and nods. "For now," he says. His eyes lift briefly, then lower again. "It's more prudent that you don't know how to reach me, or where I live, until we enter into an agreement with all the details…more refined."

Hannibal smiles. So, Will does have some kind of prey instinct in him. Some sense of self preservation. Hannibal had wondered if the FBI would have beaten that out of him. "Then, until next time," he says. Will nods, smiling softly, and then he leaves.

Hannibal returns to the study to see Alana, Margot, and Bedelia sitting around a growing fire. Margot looks up, eagerly bouncing in her seat.

Bedelia smiles. "You like him," she says, and Hannibal smiles and takes his seat. "Of course you do."

Hannibal regards her coolly and she shakes her head, humming. "You've always been attracted to the oddities."

And Will Graham is an oddity. An Omega who frequents the minds of serial killers, works for the FBI, owns and handles a gun and is willing to donate his eggs to people like Alana and Margot. An interesting specimen all round.

"I know Hannibal's type," Alana says with a coy smile.

And Hannibal has to acknowledge that perhaps she does.

Hannibal has intimate knowledge of all the physical differences between Alphas, women, and Omegas. He knows about the slick mechanism in Omegas, where the pressure points are hidden in their necks and shoulders. He knows the feel of an Alpha's enhanced canines, knows how the rough pad of the scenting palette in the rooves of their mouths sound when he slices through them. He knows the sensitive places on a woman, where to touch them to get them shaking and trembling and wet. He knows about Omega ovulation cycles, Alpha rut symptoms, and everything in between.

Most of this is theoretical. Despite his many years of experience, Hannibal has never played with, placated, or mounted an Omega before.

"I'll allow it," Bedelia says. "If."

Hannibal smiles. Always an 'If'.

"You are not to play with him or engage in anything intimate with him unless I am in the room. I will not tolerate an affair from you, Hannibal."

"I have no intention of engaging in one," Hannibal replies. He resists the urge to ask her about Anthony. He has been notably absent from their lives since Hannibal denied Bedelia's suggestion of mounting and breeding with him.

She nods sharply. "You will not bite him. You will not bond with him. You can promise me this?"

"Yes," Hannibal says, without doubt. He is a pinnacle of restraint and control, and it would take more than a pretty Omega to override years of dedicated monogamy to his wife. Technically, legally, Hannibal has the right to have both a wife and an Omega, but again, he has never been inclined to accommodate more than one lover or life partner in his home. And Omegas are much higher-maintenance. When bonded to and mated with, they require constant reassurance, placation, nests, and care. Hannibal has never felt a desire to provide any of that. He delights in Bedelia's independence, and thinks it's one of the reasons they have lived so harmoniously for so long.

"Good." Bedelia smiles. "I suppose you had better call Alana, then."

Three days later sees Will back in Hannibal's home. He's jittery again, but not nervous. There's no distress in his scent. Hannibal can smell him now, without the scents of food clogging up his nose. Will smells sharp and sweet, mint and lemongrass and chocolate like winter desserts. He finds himself looking at Will and thinking of a dish he might prepare that would complement Will's taste.

Will cradles his cup of coffee in his hands, his eyes on the dark liquid. He's wearing a wedding ring now, and Hannibal nods to it. "Do you have a wife?" he asks. That would complicate things.

Will hums, looks at the ring, and shakes his head. "A deterrent," he says. "Stops people asking too many questions."

Hannibal understands. The scent of an Omega mated to a woman does not appear as drastically changed as that of one laying with an Alpha. Bedelia hums and slides the contract over to Will to inspect.

"Everything is laid out here," she says. "I have already gone over my terms with my husband." She gives the title archly; a reminder for Will to remember his place. "He will not bite you, and all intimate engagements will take place under my supervision."

Will nods. "I understand," he says, opening the contract. His sharp eyes take everything in and he presses his lips together. He frowns, fingers stopping on one of the clauses. He shakes his head. "Not this one," he says. "I won't agree to this one."

Hannibal cocks his head to one side and turns to read it. It states that, should Will's child not be designated Omega, Will agrees to an abortion so that they can try again. He frowns, and wonders why Bedelia would even include that.

Bedelia presses her lips together, humming. "If that's the case," she says, "then you agree to raise that child as your own. I won't tolerate any bastards from my husband being adopted out and running loose in the world. You will keep it, and raise it. It will never know its father, or me."

Will lets out a quiet growl. One that Bedelia won't hear, but Hannibal hears it. He circles back to the other side of the counter to hide his smile. "I'll agree to that," he says. "And, at your command, I'll continue to breed for you. But I won't abort."

Bedelia nods. "Fine," she says, and Will nods back. Their eyes meet and lock, a cobra and mongoose staring each other down. Hannibal cannot hide his smile this time.

Will flips the contract closed and slides it back. "Change that part, and I'll sign it." Bedelia nods, her jaw clenched. Then, Will deflates, and presses his lips together. His phone chimes and he looks at it, before he stands with another sigh. "Duty calls," he says.

"Has there been a murder?" Hannibal asks.

Will nods.

"I would like to see it," Hannibal says, and looks to Bedelia. "I've met Jack Crawford. He knows me. I believe he will allow me to give my insight."

Bedelia regards him for a long, cool moment, before she nods. "Very well," she says, standing. "I'll go back to the lawyer and have him draw up another contract."

"Thank you, my love," Hannibal says, and draws her in for a kiss. She hums against his mouth, arching close to him in an uncharacteristic display of affection, and when she pulls back, her cheeks are pink, her eyes bright with something like victory. Hannibal turns to regard Will, who has finished his coffee and has his eyes lowered like the sight makes him uncomfortable. "We can take my car, if you'd like."

Will shrugs. "Suit yourself." He unlocks his phone and starts a call. "I'll let Jack know you're coming."

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

> Y'all I forgot the word 'treadmill' for like THREE HOURS.
>
> Also I want to kind of mention that there are opinions in here that are not necessarily my own, but opinions I attribute to the characters (Jack, mostly) that could be viewed as offensive, sexist, etc. But I don't think any of y'all will mind too much 'cause if you can't tell from my other fics so far I don't like Jack and he can go choke on a knot \o/

Will sits perfectly straight in the passenger seat of Hannibal's car. His back is pressed flat to the seat, his knees spaced hip-width apart and his feet flat on the floor. He has his right elbow braced up against the window, fingers of his right hand absently petting back some of his hair from his face. His other hand is relaxed and flat on his thigh, left elbow sitting on the rest between the driver and passenger seats. He's the picture of rehearsed, practical nonchalance.

But his knuckles are white and he's very deliberately keeping his face angled forward, neither turning into Hannibal nor away from him, at the risk of appearing too eager, or showing his neck. Hannibal smiles and drums his fingers along the steering wheel. "Tell me something, Will," he says.

Will hums.

"What kind of man elects to be a surrogate for his friends not once, but twice? And in such a short amount of time?" Hannibal asks. After all, Morgan Verger is less than a year old, meaning Will gave his eggs to Alana and Margot just before that time.

Will makes a quiet, amused sound. When Hannibal looks at him, Will's eyes are heavy-lidded and his mouth is curled up in a smile. His right hand stops messing with his hair and brushes over his mouth, like he's trying to hide the affectionate expression.

"I suppose it would be a selfish man," Will says. Hannibal raises an eyebrow, putting his gaze back on the road.

"An opinion I'm sure not many would share," Hannibal says. "You're giving a piece of yourself and receiving no emotional compensation. Although I'm sure Alana and Margot would allow you to see your son, you know from the contract not to expect the same from Bedelia."

Hannibal senses Will's smile. "And you, the same, should your child be Alpha or female."

Hannibal pauses, before he must give a nod of agreement. He's not sure if he deliberately avoided placing himself in league with his wife, but clearly Will picked up on it. His sharp

eyes see everything.

Will is quiet for a moment, before he lets out another soft hum. "And what about you, Doctor Lecter?" he asks. "Do you find yourself lacking in 'emotional compensation'? This child might be yours by blood, but it will be a bastard."

Hannibal smiles. "Do you think that kind of thing would bother me?"

"It's a slap in the face to your lineage," Will replies with a smile, shaking his head. "An insult to your character."

"And you know me so well," Hannibal returns, "to know what might offend my character."

Will doesn't answer, but Hannibal can feel that his smile has grown. This verbal sparring amuses him, and Hannibal realizes a moment too late that he is quite enjoying it as well. "To answer your question," Will says with a sigh; "I don't need the money, that's true. And if it was a matter of wanting to bear young, I could find a mate or a wife and do that easily."

"Then why?" Hannibal asks.

Will presses his lips together, rubbing his thumb along the side of his nose. "Doctor Du Maurier cannot have children," he says. "It must be her, otherwise this entire arrangement wouldn't be happening. Meaning she has lost the one power that you do not have. She controls your lineage and your future. Or, she wants to. But she can't, and so she must do the next best thing, which is to control me." He pauses. "Or any Omega you choose to mount."

Hannibal hums, fighting back his smile. He wonders if Will assumes he might change his mind – and at what point would Hannibal do so? They will be signing a contract by the end of the day, he's sure. Perhaps Will sees some failing in himself that Hannibal does not recognize yet.

"Have you been using these gifts Alana mentioned to read me and my wife?" Hannibal asks.

Will's eyes flash. Hannibal sees his head turn in his periphery, but keeps his eyes on the road. 'See too much, don't see enough'. That's what Will had said. Hannibal will not give him the upper ground by meeting his gaze.

Will clucks his tongue in the side of his mouth and sniffs, the hand on his thigh flexing before he forces it to go lax again. "You're a psychiatrist, Doctor Lecter," he says, and Hannibal nods. "So is your wife, and Alana." He nods again. "Can you ever turn it off? Would you, if you could?"

"A 'No' to both of those, I think," Hannibal replies. "But I am never troubled by what I see."

"Implying that I am."

"You read the deeds and motivations of serial killers. Are you saying that you are never troubled by what reflects back at you?"

They reach a stoplight, glowing red, and Hannibal takes the moment to turn and look at Will. Will is frowning, his eyes fixed on the gear shift. He swallows, runs his tongue along his upper teeth, and shakes his head.

"There are other ways to do this," Will says. Hannibal tilts his head to one side. "I could donate eggs to Doctor Du Maurier, like I did with Margot and Alana."

"We have discussed it," Hannibal replies, accepting the abrupt shift in conversational topics as the light turns green and he begins to drive again. "Bedelia and I agreed that we would avoid chemical treatments at all costs. That would include the practice of hyper-developing eggs, harvesting them, and then artificial insemination. And that's not assuming she would need hormone replacements or other medications to ensure a happy and healthy pregnancy."

"And yet you enter into this contract with me, assuming there is nothing about me that would damage the child," Will returns. "I could be a drug addict. Or have cancer. Or diabetes."

"You work for the FBI, so I assume you are not a drug addict," Hannibal says, unable to hold back his smile. Will is being dramatic, and it's endearing. "And you smell healthy enough."

Will looks at him again. "…Have you been scenting me?" he asks, guarded.

Hannibal shakes his head. "My sense of smell has always been stronger than most," he replies coolly. "I knew one of my teachers had stomach cancer three weeks before he was diagnosed."

"A double-edged sword," Will says. "And you still ask to accompany me to a crime scene." His smile is sharp, teasing; "I can't imagine a dead body smells very good."

"Every gift given to us is a double-edged sword, Will," Hannibal replies. He can see, up ahead, the red and blue flashing lights of police vehicles. They're swarming the parking lot of a hotel, and there is already yellow tape and black-coated examiners and forensic specialists crowding the scene. Hannibal spots one of the large black SUVs that are characteristic of the FBI and drives around the edge of the parking lot, stopping his car a little way from the first line of yellow tape. "So, too, can it be swung one way or another. You might use your empathic gifts for social work, for instance."

"And you might use your sense of smell and need for control to be a professional chef," Will replies airily. Hannibal smiles, and gets out of the car. "We cannot help our calling in life, Doctor Lecter," Will adds, head bowed against the strong wind and hands dug deeply into the pockets of his coat as he circles the front of the car and falls into step beside Hannibal.

"No," Hannibal concedes. "I suppose we can't."

Hannibal spots Jack immediately, remembering him from the last time they'd met at an Abnormal Psychology conference in D.C. last summer. He looks much as Hannibal remembers him, his sharp eyes catching them, sticking out like sore thumbs amidst the white coats and yellow-lettered FBI jackets.

He waves Will over and Will ducks under the police tape, Hannibal following behind as they approach Jack. "Doctor Lecter," Jack greets, shaking Hannibal's hand quickly lest the wind do them harm. Jack nods over at Will, but doesn't really go out of his way to acknowledge him. In truth, Will seems like a shadow, passing around them both undetected so that, by the time Jack turns to lead Hannibal to the crime scene, Will is already through the doors.

"Agent Crawford, a pleasure," Hannibal replies, ducking his face into his scarf as he follows Jack inside. Almost immediately, after the doors close, they are enveloped in warmth, and Hannibal straightens with a sigh, following the breadcrumb trail of people down a corridor, where there are signs leading to the hotel sauna. "It's been a while since we spoke. How have you been?"

"The same as always," Jack replies with a shrug. "And yourself?"

"Smooth sailing," Hannibal says. "With the promise of discovering new land."

Jack huffs. "A new venture?"

"Something like that."

Jack waits for him to say anything, and when Hannibal doesn't, he smirks and shakes his head again. There is another moment of silence as they turn a corner. Hannibal catches a glimpse of Will's hair and back before he turns another corner. It feels like a tame, deconstructed chase. Will's scent is left behind in the air, on the walls as he unconsciously brushes his hands across door handles and signposts. And Hannibal is giving chase, following where Will is leading them both.

He swallows back his mouthful of saliva and clears his throat.

"How did you and Will come to know each other?" Jack asks, too casually. It's not uncommon for Alphas who work closes with Omegas to become protective of them. Jack may very well be Will's legal guardian, for all Hannibal knows. He's sure Will would have mentioned having a guardian, though – legally, Will cannot consent to donating eggs or being a surrogate without such a man's permission if he does exist.

Hannibal smiles. "Will and I have a mutual acquaintance with Doctor Bloom," he replies, and Jack gives a hum of recognition at the name. "I'll confess, I only first met him earlier this week. But when he mentioned working for you, I thought it would be a shame not to take advantage of the opportunity to see the practical applications of my own career path."

"You compare profiling serial killers and therapy?" Jack asks, amused and indulgent. Hannibal knows he has viewed the practice of therapy as 'soft', something for those who are not strong enough to stand up in the world by themselves. And, true, it is not as graphic as happening upon a crime scene and reading the thoughts of a serial killer, but Hannibal thinks it naïve of Jack not to think that one and the other could exist to society's mutual benefit.

"Imagine how fewer killers there might be, had they effective psychiatrists," Hannibal replies with a smile. "We are both men of evidence, and men of the truth. You and Will come at it from the sword, and I come from the pen, and the voice."

"I don't remember you being so poetic," Jack says, as they round the corner and come to a stop in the hallway. In front of them, the corridor extends for a few feet, then stops. One door is made of wood and glass, and there is a sign for the sauna. Hannibal can smell heat, and something like dryer lint. The other door is clear and reveals a gym beyond. There are a few treadmills, a mirror next to a pile of yoga mats and weighted balls, and a rowing machine in his immediate line of sight.

Will is standing between the two doors. He tenses up and turns when Jack and Hannibal come to a halt, likely sensing the presence of the two Alphas behind him. Omegas are particularly sensitive to anything that might imply imminent danger to them.

Will licks his lips, rolls his shoulders, and lifts his chin. "This is the third murder this month where someone was steamed," he says.

Jack raises an eyebrow. "Not like this," he replies.

"No," Will says, and shakes his head. "This is…escalation." He turns back around, and Hannibal can see he's wearing blue surgical gloves now. He opens the sauna door and Hannibal takes in a deep breath. The innards smell very closely like roasted pork, burning blood, steaming cartilage. "Look."

Jack huffs, putting a hand over his nose, and walks towards Will. Will steps to one side, apparently unaffected by the scents of the steaming pile of dead flesh sitting in the corner of the room. Hannibal sees what once was the man's face, melted down to the bone, his mouth wide open in a scream.

"It happened quickly," Will says, and steps into the sauna. The air itself is relatively cool since the sauna is not in operation, but it's very humid – enough that Hannibal feels himself start to sweat under his clothes. "Look here." He points to the side of the dead man's skull and Jack leans in, wincing at the smell. Hannibal sees that there is a small break just above the temple. "The killer came in, stabbed the victim, then locked the sauna over the weekend."

Jack pulls back, his eyebrows raised. "Like the murder in Annapolis," Will says, pressing Jack to understand. His eyes are bright in the low lights of the sauna, almost glowing. The humidity is darkening his hair and making it curl with more severity at his neck, and his cheeks are turning pink. "The burned man. I bet if we examine his skull, we'll find another wound just like it. The first one, he ironed an Alpha's face. That was him in his infancy, and now he's turning public. He's getting bolder, Jack."

"But why?" Jack asks. He leads the way out of the sauna, allowing the forensic examiners room to move. Will follows him and Hannibal brings up the rear. Jack leads them out to the larger hotel corridor so they all have room to stand. "If he kills them quickly, it's not about them suffering. Why burn them at all?"

Will bites his lower lip, looking back over Hannibal's shoulder towards the sauna. "To cover his tracks," he says. Then, he frowns, his nostrils flaring even though it's not to scent the air. "Is the gym open?"

"Locked on the weekend," Jack says.

Will hums. "Has anyone been in?"

Jack pauses, before he raises his voice. "Jimmy!" he yells. A tall, grey-haired man straightens and pokes his head out of the sauna. "Try the gym doors!" Jimmy raises an eyebrow, but exits the sauna, wraps his hand around the door handle, and tugs it to try and open the gym. It's locked, and he shrugs. "Thank you!"

Will nods to it. "I need to get in that room," he says.

Jack lets out a quiet hum, then he nods. "I'll be right back with the superintendent," he says, and walks back towards the main lobby, leaving Will and Hannibal alone.

Hannibal lets the silence linger for a moment. Will's eyes don't move from the door, and it bares the side of his neck. Hannibal forces himself not to stare, knowing Will can feel it if he does. "Jack must have a lot of faith in your abilities," he says.

Will smiles, sharp and quick, and tilts his head to regard Hannibal. "Would you say that you know Jack well?" he asks.

"Professionally, yes," Hannibal replies.

"And in your *professional* opinion, do you think Jack would allow an Omega to do this if he didn't have faith in that Omega's abilities?"

Hannibal raises an eyebrow, unable to fight back his smile this time. Will regards him like he is a champion and Hannibal has just stepped into the fighting ring to challenge his title. "Do you feel threatened by me, Will?" he asks.

"Should I?" Will counters.

Hannibal's smile widens. "No," he replies, and Will nods but there's a flash in his eyes that looks almost disappointed. His irises have turned greener without the sun to reflect.

Jack returns with the superintendent, who has a ring of keys attached to his belt. Jack nods to the gym and the man shuffles down the hallway, looking pale and drawn. Will follows and smiles at him when the man opens the door, giving him a nod of thanks, and steps inside.

Jack and Hannibal follow him into the gym. Once inside, the navigated corner reveals a water cooler, a television that is currently off, a towel station, and a step machine. Hannibal looks around and sees very little out of place, which is to be expected if the gym was locked all weekend and then shut down for a crime scene.

Will cocks his head to one side, like there is someone whispering something to him over his shoulder. He frowns, and turns just enough to reveal the corner of his jaw. "Why was the gym closed?" he asks.

Jack looks down at his notes. "Apparently there was an issue with the air conditioning over the weekend," he says. "They were supposed to section off this entire floor to clean the ducts."

Will nods, straightening up. He takes a deep breath, and Hannibal can see in the mirror reflection as his eyes close and his face goes blank.

Jack puts a hand on Hannibal's arm, coaxing him to stand back. He opens the door and barks an order to the analysts in the sauna; "Clear the room!"

They leave. Apparently this is a routine practice. Hannibal tilts his head to one side, intrigued.

Will open's his eyes, and they're out of focus and yet sharp all at once. Like the subtle difference in dimension between someone's eyes and their contact lenses. Will walks over to one of the treadmills, and steps onto it. He presses his hands flat to it and raises his head.

"I choose this one," he says quietly. "It gives me a perfect line of sight to the door. There's no one else around."

He turns the treadmill on, frowning as he places his feet on either side of the revolving mat. The lights flicker, forming a heart, then settle into ready mode. "I…come here to wait," he murmurs. "I've taken the sign off the sauna door that tells people it's closed. Someone will come, eventually." Will touches the workout settings, head cocked to one side, and presses 'Start' on the machine with his gloved hand. Then he jumps onto it, running a few steps and then putting his feet on either side again. He turns the machine off and, as it slows, he walks on it, and as it slides to a stop he pushes his hands against the small bars that are meant to measure heart rate, and lowers his face.

He parts his jaws and takes a deep breath, then he opens his eyes. "Have Beverly swab this one," he says, and steps off the machine.

Will walks slowly to the door. Or rather, he prowls. He moves like a predator in the night, and Hannibal is enthralled. Will walks in a subtle crouch, knees always bent as he slides his hands along the mirror, along the wall, and then reaches the door.

"There he is," Will breathes, his eyes bright, even though there's no one there to see. Will's eyes move like they're watching someone walk into the sauna, and his mouth twitches in a smile that looks at once foreign and right at home on his face. He opens the door to the gym, inward-swinging, soundless, and stalks his prey into the sauna.

"As soon as he sees me, he's afraid," Will whispers. He reaches into his pocket and pulls out nothing, but his hand is shaped around something thin, like a pencil or screwdriver. "He tries to run -." Will circles the center stones, comes to a stop in front of the body. "But I chase him. I catch him." He tilts his head to one side. "I…"

He frowns. His upper lip curls back and he jerks his chin up like a horse being forced to take the bit. "Can Brian confirm if the man was mated?" he asks.

"No signs of the Alpha Voice growth in his neck," Jack replies.

Will hums, leaning in. He carefully peels back the shredded flesh that was the man's face, smoothing it out along his cheek, his neck, and his shoulder. Hannibal leans forward when he

sees, amid the wrinkles and browning, evidence of teeth marks.

"I bite him," Will breathes. He pulls back, his eyes wide, and he bares his teeth again. Omegas don't have sharpened, pronounced canines like Alphas do, but when Will snarls, Hannibal thinks such a thing wouldn't matter. "I bite him and he tries to attack me. He tries to kill me, so I stab him in the head."

He takes a step back. "In this moment, the sin hits me," he says. "I realize what I've done. How…*wrong* it is. I burn him, because that's what men like him deserve. What *I* deserve." He closes his eyes, opens them again, and sucks in a breath. "I have brought him to this place, of Hellfire and damnation, and that is where he'll stay until I set him free. This is my design."

There's a moment of tense, quiet stillness, and then Will heaves a breath like he's just breached the surface of a lake after minutes underwater. His chest expands sharply and his shoulders rise like he's trying to protect his neck, and then he turns to regard Jack.

"Hellfire and damnation, huh?" Jack says.

Will nods. "These Alphas he's killing – he's attracted to them. And ashamed of it."

Jack raises an eyebrow. "A gay Alpha tries to bite the object of his affection. They fight him back. He panics, kills them, and then tries to hide the evidence by burning them?"

"He must work for the air conditioning repair company," Will says, raising his eyes. He nods to the exposed air duct in the hallway. "That wasn't a lie. There were repairs being done here. They would have given them access to the gym and sauna so they could work." He pauses. "This Alpha will be…quiet. Doesn't like to get in the way. Only child. Religious background."

Jack nods, writing everything that Will is saying down. He closes his notepad with another short nod. "Alright," he says. "I have all I need." It's a dismissal and Jack nods to both of them, shakes Hannibal's hand, and leaves the hallway.

Hannibal regards Will for a long moment, before he smiles. "Remarkable," he says.

Will hums, shrugging in a gesture that tries to be humble, but the smile on his face seems satisfied. Hannibal senses that Jack doles out praise very rarely, deserved or otherwise. Omegas, however progressive they deem themselves, react well to praise. Especially from an Alpha.

"Just read the evidence," Will says, and leads the way out of the corridor and back towards the lobby. Hannibal follows along, even though there is enough room for him to walk side-by-side with Will. He enjoys the implicit nature of following Will, knowing that Will is going to have to look over his shoulder if he wants to see Hannibal, aware of the fact that Will can feel Hannibal's heat and presence at his back. He imagines the hair on Will's neck is standing up, his instincts itching and prickly at the fact that an Alpha is pursuing him, however tamely. "You read people, I read bodies. It's not that remarkable."

"I respectfully disagree," Hannibal says lightly. He steps up to Will's side so they walk as equals to his car, the wind at their backs carrying them forward. Will doesn't respond and Hannibal sighs. "It's unfortunate that this killer thinks so lowly of himself."

"Would you rather he be a narcissist?" Will replies.

"I'm simply saying that, if he didn't hate himself for what he desires, there would be three less bodies taking up room in your head."

"Bodies don't take up that much space," Will says. He pauses, his hand on the door handle to the passenger side of the car. He sighs, gets in, and Hannibal does the same on his side. The wind and the sounds of investigators goes quiet when the doors shut, and it's a peaceful and companionable silence that fills the air between them. "But I see what you're saying." He shakes his head. "Desire is one of those things that became a matter of public opinion, far too long ago for anyone to stop it now."

"Yes," Hannibal says, starting the car and driving away from the flashing lights and yellow tape. "I've often found society's views on things like desire and love…restrictive."

Will hums, cocking his head to one side. "Alphas have the most freedom of any of us," he says. "You can marry and mate with whoever you choose, regardless of social standing, pair-bonding, or fear of abuse. You could father a thousand children and not claim a single one. You can divorce your wife and fear no consequences except that people will start trying to get you to marry their daughters and Omega children, before the place where your wedding ring was starts to get tan."

Hannibal smiles. "Do I detect bitterness, Will?" he asks.

"It's all a construct," Will replies darkly, his tone acidic and stinging Hannibal's nose. "Based off of nothing. There are Omegas that can lift cars and Alphas that can't throw a baseball. There are women who can poison forty people without blinking and Alphas that cannot stomach the thought of eating meat."

"This view of yours is not quite progressive, not quite anarchy. Entropy, more like."

"I'm simply saying, if Adam had been an Omega, the world would have turned out very differently."

"This killer would likely agree with you," Hannibal remarks. "He seems just as ashamed of his own nature as you are."

"I never said I was ashamed," Will says sharply. "But it's refreshing to see an Alpha be the one unsure of himself for a change."

"So you admit to feeling unsure of yourself?"

Will is silent, and when Hannibal looks at him, he sees that Will is smiling. "Inferring," he says, and his voice is low and gentle. His hand curls up on his thigh like he's resisting the urge to reach out and touch. "You're very good at what you do," he adds after a moment.

"As are you," Hannibal replies. He can't remember the last time he has enjoyed something like simple conversation this much. He swallows, tightens his hands on the steering wheel, and debates being silent. Then; "You are of course under no obligation to do so, but I would be very happy if you agreed to accompany me for lunch. Until Bedelia returns with the contract."

Will hums, his smile widening. "Are you so eager to touch me, Doctor Lecter?" he murmurs.

Hannibal presses his lips together, resisting the urge to admit that perhaps this warmth in his hands is exactly that. He cannot afford to give Will that kind of power, that kind of knowledge. Bedelia may have surrendered control to Hannibal, but it is Will that holds the most power in this arrangement, and Hannibal is worried for the moment Will realizes that as well. If he hasn't already.

"I simply wish to get to know you better, Will," Hannibal finally manages to say. "If I am to play with you and induce your heat, I will need to know more about you than what you look like and what you do for a living."

"Semantics," Will says with a dismissive wave of his hand. "I'm sure you're more than familiar with the erogenous zones and pressure points on my body, even before you've seen it."

Hannibal shakes his head and lifts his chin. "Indulge me, then," he says. Will huffs, but doesn't protest. "God forbid we should become friendly towards each other."

Will smiles. Hannibal can hear it in his tone. "I don't find you that interesting," he says.

Hannibal smiles back. "You will."

Hannibal drives Will back to his home, surprised to see Bedelia's car still there. Will notices as well, and shifts his weight, looking uncomfortable.

"We should reschedule that lunch," he says.

"Nonsense," Hannibal replies. "If she has the updated contract, you will need to review and sign it anyway."

Will looks like he wants to protest, but can find nothing to say. He gets out of the car and follows Hannibal into his house, his head lowered and his shoulders hunched up to protect his neck. As though Bedelia might attack him on sight.

"My love?" Hannibal calls, and smiles when he hears her heels clicking on the hardwood floor. She comes into view, as lovely as ever, and greets him with a small smile. Her throat flexes when she sees that Will is still with him.

Hannibal approaches her and pulls her into a chaste kiss. "Did you make it to the lawyer already?" he asks.

She hums, nodding. "I have it in the dining room," she says.

"Excellent," Hannibal says. "Why don't you and Will go there, and I will prepare lunch?"

He leaves before either of them can protest, relying on their natural inclination towards politeness – Bedelia's well-bred and developed, Will's ingrained as a survival tactic – so that they both remain in his home while he fixes the food.

The kitchen is normally the domain of the Omega. They have overdeveloped scent palettes in the roof of their mouths, more sensitive than those of most Alphas, and their evolved need to provide and cater to the needs of their dominants leads them to work such as childcare, culinary arts, or softer callings that do not upset their delicacies.

Will Graham is not delicate. He is fine in the way the keys of a piano are; beautiful, able to create sweet music, but strong and tied to strings tight enough to cut a man. Hannibal wants to know what kind of lovely sounds Will can make. He wants to know if Will would play for him just as sweetly in the dark.

Dangerous thoughts. Hannibal swallows back his mouthful of saliva as he pre-heats the oven and takes out the remainder of the 'lamb' he had served when Adrian came to dinner. He chops up greens, carrots, hard-boiled eggs, and ginger into a salad for Bedelia and to act as a side dish to the meat.

He is dying to listen in on Bedelia and Will in the dining room, but resists the urge to hover or to eavesdrop. It's rude, for one thing, and he feels that Will would know if he was being listened in on. His powers of observation and his sharp note of everything Hannibal does and does not say has already given him away as a man constantly aware of his surroundings, and Hannibal would not risk altering his behavior for the sake of his own curiosity.

He has questions, still – he understands that Will managed to deflect the conversation effortlessly when Hannibal asked him why he is willing to do this. Contrary to what Will has said, and despite however many liberation movements there have been, Omegas are still largely viewed as the weakest sex. Their vulnerability is practically genetic at this point, as hard-wired into their biology as an Alpha's teeth or a woman's cervix. Will seems completely at ease revealing his most vulnerable places, lifting his weakness like an offering at Hannibal's altar, and yet he guards his thoughts and motivations so thoroughly that Hannibal feels rabid with the need to know them.

They might be boring, he tells himself. Will might be hiding what he thinks because he knows Hannibal would not be impressed by them, but Hannibal knows as soon as he thinks that, that this is not the case. Will is very aware of how he appears. He wears his own meat-suit like Hannibal wears his, and shows cracks in his armor like he might give out treats to his dogs; a reward for good behavior.

The oven beeps at him and Hannibal slides the leftover 'lamb' inside, letting it heat up without drying. He presses his lips together, and takes a bottle of wine and three glasses out.

He can offer them wine, at least. That is a reasonable excuse to go into the dining room.

He sets the bottle and three glasses on a tray and walks into the dining room. Will and Bedelia are sitting in silence, and Bedelia raises her eyes when she sees Hannibal come in. Her face softens somewhat, and she takes a glass with a grateful hum. "Thank you, Hannibal," she says kindly, and Hannibal smiles at her.

He looks to Will, who hesitates, before taking his own glass. He swallows and sets the glass down in front of him, spinning it idly.

Hannibal sees that there is a thin folder sitting in front of his place at the table.

"Will has signed it," Bedelia says warmly, like she intends the words to be kind and full of praise. Will works his jaw to one side and takes in a deep breath through his nose, and takes a long drink of his wine. "After your signature, it'll be all ready."

"Excellent," Hannibal says, straightening. "I shall read it over lunch."

She nods, her expression somewhat aggravated at being made to wait. Hannibal can sense her impatience, and wonders if she is eager to see how Will reacts to being played with and placated, or if she is simply thinking about the end goal: the sooner Hannibal gets a baby in Will, the sooner she will have a child of her own.

Hannibal takes the meat out and splits it between his and Will's plates, and settles one plate on his forearm, the second in his hand, and holds the third as he navigates his way back into the dining room. He sets down Bedelia's salad first, then his and Will's plates, and retrieves silverware in his last trip.

Will takes in a deep breath, setting his wine glass down and taking his fork and knife in hand. "Smells amazing," he says.

Hannibal smiles. "Another selfish act," he replies. Will's mouth twitches and he gives Hannibal a playful glare, before he starts to eat.

Bedelia hums, arching an eyebrow. "How was the crime scene, Hannibal?" she asks. "Gruesome enough for your tastes?"

"A wonderfully chaotic result of our society's stigmas," Hannibal replies with a smile. He takes the folder in hand and opens it, reading the contract, since he can see Bedelia's eyes continually falling to it. "Will shared some very strong opinions with me regarding that."

"Oh?" Bedelia asks, fixing her steely gaze on Will.

Will flushes, nodding. "The killer is gay, and kills the objects of his desire when they reject him," he says, swallowing the words down with wine.

"Crimes of passion are intimate," Bedelia says. "Perhaps he is a product of incorrect social grooming."

Hannibal sees Will pause, raising his head. He tilts it to one side and Hannibal raises his eyes over the contract to see Will give Bedelia a look like he's not sure if he should be offended or not. Will's eyes meet hers steadily for a long moment.

Then, he relents, and takes another bite of meat. "Perhaps," he concedes.

Bedelia smiles, and looks at Hannibal. "How are you coming along, my love?" she asks.

Hannibal hums, putting his eyes back on the neat typography of the contract. At the bottom of the last page he sees Bedelia's arcing signature, as well as Will's own, pressed much harsher and deeper through the paper. Angry.

He reads the contract, and then reads it again as Will and Bedelia eat. It promises compensation enough to cover all of Will's medical pills, prescriptions, and a modest gas allowance for Will to drive to and from his home for play sessions. Upon the birth of a healthy Omega child, Will shall receive thirty thousand dollars as a final payment. He idly wonders how she decided on the number, but doesn't bother asking.

Will is commanded within the contract to adhere to a play session every day, providing that Bedelia is available, and to notify them if he cannot come to them, to allow them adequate time for Hannibal and Bedelia to drive to Will's home. Hannibal finds it interesting that Will is suddenly willing to tell them where he lives – although, with the contract, perhaps he feels safer within the defined rules.

If Will's child is not an Omega, he agrees to raise it as his own, citing neither Hannibal nor Bedelia's involvement or lineage. He will not expect compensation or financial or emotional support for the comfort and care of that child. If all parties are amenable, he will attempt to breed a second time after a recovery period.

Will agrees to immediately cease all prescriptions that may affect his ability to go into heat. Once he is in heat, he will be restricted to a guest bedroom in Bedelia's home.

He blinks at that section. "Your home, my love?" he asks slowly.

Will grits his teeth and looks at Bedelia as Hannibal does. Bedelia smiles, a picture of careful relaxation. "I have more space, Hannibal," she replies. "And fewer instances that would call me away from the house. I would be able to care for Will's immediate needs much more readily."

"I doubt I would be away from him often," Hannibal says in a mild protest. It feels uncomfortable, speaking about Will when he is immediately present. "Especially once he was fully entrenched in heat."

Bedelia's smile gets tight. "But I may be," she says. "And I would never ask you to control yourself around an in-heat Omega. You would run the risk of being an exile in your own home. My house is better suited." She finishes with a sharp nod; "Will agreed to it."

Another way in which she desperately tries to flex her claws and exhibit control. Hannibal hums in acquiescence, deciding that it is a small pittance to pay. He isn't sure he would want

Will around when in heat anyway – the scent of an Omega in heat is meant to be incredibly distracting, meant to drive Alphas half-mad with the need to mount and provide for them. Terribly inconvenient. It would be ideal for Will to be elsewhere so that Hannibal's home remains a sanctuary.

He takes a pen from his breast pocket and signs the contract, above Bedelia's name where there is space. Her eyes are glowing with victory as she takes the contract and sets it to one side. "Wonderful," she says.

Will gives a non-committal hum, taking another bite of the meat. His plate is almost clean. His phone chimes and he reaches into his pocket, frowning at the screen. He sets his fork down to hold the phone with both hands. "They found a DNA match from the treadmill," he says, and Hannibal straightens up in interest. "Guy has a bunch of priors; aggravated assault, restraining orders, rehab…" He sighs. "Jack wants me there to interview him."

Hannibal nods, standing and ready to escort Will to the door. Bedelia stands as well. "Here," she says, and hands Will her cell phone. "Put your phone number in here, and I'll text you mine. You will call us when you're on your way back."

Will frowns, tilting his head to one side. He looks to Hannibal, hesitating. "…On my way back?" he asks.

"Yes," Bedelia replies, "unless there is some reason that we cannot start the play sessions today."

"…Oh." Will swallows, rubbing the back of his neck and over his jaw. "Of course." He takes Bedelia's phone and programs his number into it. Bedelia quickly takes her phone back and sends a text, smiling when Will's phone chimes. As though she doubted the legitimacy of it. Will nods, his eyes flashing, and he gives Hannibal a small, tight smile. "I'll let you know when I'm free."

"Goodbye, Will," Bedelia says airily, and Will nods, smiling at her, just as strained, and Hannibal chases him to the door. He opens it for Will and Will hesitates on the threshold. He looks like he's about to say something, and then Hannibal hears Bedelia's heels on the floor, and Will's jaw snaps shut hard and quickly enough that his teeth click together.

He sighs through his nose, swallows, and nods. "I'll see you later," he says, and heads towards his car. Hannibal doesn't close the door until the glow of Will's taillights turns the corner.

He huffs, and turns to regard Bedelia coolly. "You ought to be careful, my love," he says, returning to the dining room to clear the plates. "I fear your womb might not be the only 'inhospitable environment' nowadays."

He knows the words cut her. He wants them to. He's offended on Will's behalf, bristling at her presumptuous attempts at control. It would be good for her to learn that she might have written the musical score, but it is up to Hannibal to play it how he sees fit.

He meets her eyes and sees her regarding him coldly, tears brightening the corners where she refuses to let them fall. She finishes her wine and takes the contract and leaves without a word. Hannibal isn't sure if it counts as a victory or not.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

shorter chapter but there's NSFW stuff in here :D Also I cannot for the life of me get rid of that end note so please disregard! I think I'm good on tags.

Bedelia returns past dinner time, which Hannibal senses is by design, so that she doesn't have to sit through watching Hannibal eat whatever person he has cooked. She kisses him in greeting, cheek to cheek, and seems to have forgiven him for his sharp remark earlier that day.

"Would you like anything to drink?" he asks her.

"Please," she replies, sitting down at the kitchen barstool as Hannibal cleans the dishes and puts the leftovers away. He pours her a glass of Rioja, smiling when she swallows back her protest at the dark red wine. She much prefers white. Hannibal suspects it's more of a visual thing than anything else. But she takes a sip of it with a quiet hum, drumming her nails on the counter. "There are some additional things I wish to go over, before Will gets here."

Hannibal gives her a hum of encouragement, his eyes on the soapy water as he starts to clean his plates and cooking dishes.

She pauses. Hannibal allows her to stew. The pending conversation promises to unsettle her much more than it would ever disturb him. He wonders if she repeats to herself what the end result is – if, when she sees Hannibal touch Will, and play with him, and mount him, she will be thinking of the Omega child promised to her, hopefully with nothing inherited from his mother immediately visible.

Hannibal fights back a smile, thinking of how wonderful a child would look, made in his image, but with Will's lovely eyes and curls. He thinks of Morgan Verger.

"There are certain things that I, as a woman, lack, in regards to the understanding and observing an Alpha-Omega mating," she says, every word carefully controlled and restrained as she says it. Hannibal hums in answer. "I know what would happen if you were to bite Will, and I know you have promised not to. But what if he were to bite you?"

Hannibal presses his lips together, ignoring the subtle flutter of heat he feels in his stomach at the idea. "Without the hormonal trigger of being bitten, he would not develop a Voice of his own," he replies, since he knows that this is what she is really asking. "And if, somehow, his hormones allowed such a change, without constant praise, placation, and a pair-bond, it would be very weak. It would likely fade away altogether." He pauses and looks over his shoulder at her. "Did you not discuss these things with him as well?"

"To a point," Bedelia replies coolly. "He is very careful about what he says."

"Yes," Hannibal says, turning back to the sink. "All three of us have that in common."

"He assured me that he would remain submissive and restrained through the play sessions," Bedelia continues. "That, for all intents and purposes, if something…unfortunate…were to happen, it would be through no fault of his own."

Hannibal smiles. "An interesting choice of words," he says. "Yours, or his?"

"Regardless," Bedelia says, blowing past the question, "I have something that will eliminate the threat altogether."

Hannibal raises his eyebrows, and turns to see that Bedelia has set two items on the kitchen counter. One of them is a mask, all-white, meant to sit over the mouth and nose of a man. There are holes through which to breathe and straps designed to go around the back of someone's head and neck. The second item is a thin, wide metal collar. It looks like it would cover the entirety of someone's neck, from just under their jaw, to their collarbones.

He frowns at them. "Where did you get these?"

"I had them sent to my home after our dinner with Will," Bedelia replies.

"And who provided them?"

Bedelia smiles, smug, her eyes bright. "Will did," she says, and Hannibal cannot tell if she is lying or not.

"How long has he had these for?" Hannibal asks. He can see marks of wear on the collar and mask, and knows that they are not new. So too, he knows that Will could not have possibly had these made and shipped to Bedelia between their first meeting and today.

Bedelia shrugs. "I didn't ask," she replies. Her smile widens, like a cat that has a mouse stuck in its claws. She delights at having troubled Hannibal, and Hannibal must give credit where it is due – he did not expect to be disturbed by this conversation, and he was wrong. "It seems there is more to Mister Graham than even you saw, my love."

Hannibal swallows, and turns away to drain the sink and wash the dishes to set aside on the drying rack. "I can't play with him, wearing those," he says. "Play requires access to his neck, and his mouth."

"I am aware," Bedelia replies coolly. "These are only for when he goes into heat."

"My love, I can't help but feel that you do not truly trust me when I say I can restrain myself," Hannibal says, as mildly as he can manage. In truth his head feels warm and his teeth are itching. Which is a strange reaction. Words keep spinning around in his head that have no value to them – how dare Bedelia presume to restrict Hannibal's rights to Will's body?

But Hannibal has no right to Will's body. And even if he did, it is only through Bedelia's consent. If Hannibal were to exert his rights as an Alpha and wish to take an Omega as a

mate, the law requires that the wife, if there is one, accept the Omega since it is up to the woman to primarily run the household, and the Omega would still submit to her dominion in absence of his Alpha.

Bedelia hums, sounding pleased, like she has somehow caught Hannibal in a lie. "Why would I ask you to show restraint, when I can simply take away the temptation?" she asks.

"I wonder," Hannibal says coldly, "if you would be asking the same of me had I chosen Adrian." He turns off the water and dries his hands, turning so that he can regard her. "Or Anthony."

She looks at him, wide-eyed, and Hannibal knows the answer. Somehow Will threatens her more than those other two might, and Hannibal knows why. Will is headstrong, wild, *unrefined*. He will not be cowed and will not be conquered unless he allows himself to be. Bedelia cannot tug on his puppet strings like she could with Anthony or Adrian.

Control freak.

The sound of her phone ringing saves her from having to answer. She swallows and takes it out of her purse and answers it. "Good evening, Will," she says, and looks to Hannibal. Hannibal can hear Will's voice over the phone, soft, too quiet for him to hear what Will is saying. After a moment, Bedelia smiles. "Wonderful. Hannibal and I are at his home. We will see you when you get here."

She hangs up.

"I'm surprised you didn't tell him to go to your house," Hannibal says, unwilling to let go of the petty, bitter anger still sitting low in his throat. It is fortunate that Bedelia cannot hear his growl, and he wonders at the vehemence of his reaction, and cannot help but think that perhaps choosing Adrian or Anthony would have proven a more harmonious endeavor.

Bedelia smiles. "We are already here," she says. "And if you can restrain yourself from chasing him after he has filled one of your rooms with his scent, my mind will be put at ease."

It's a challenge, and Hannibal understands. Without being in heat, having sex with Will is pointless in regards to conception, but he will likely get slick, and Hannibal may choose to bare his skin, stain pieces of his furniture with Will's sweat and have his scent linger in the air after he's gone. Which means he will be a reminder: a distraction. And Bedelia knows how good Hannibal's sense of smell is.

He clenches his jaw, before he forces his expression to smooth into a welcoming, cordial smile. "We shall play in the guest bedroom," he says, and Bedelia nods sharply.

"An excellent idea."

Will arrives at Hannibal's home a short time later. The sky outside is completely dark and the streak of light created by his car headlights is a jarring break in the blackness. He drives up and parks between Hannibal's car and Bedelia's, then he turns it off and gets out, head ducked low against the wind and his hands deep in his pockets.

Hannibal watches him approach from the guest bedroom window, knowing Bedelia is downstairs to greet him at the door. He hears Will knock, and goes downstairs as Bedelia lets him in, and Will takes off his coat and hangs it in the closet by the door.

Will meets his eyes. His hair is a mess from the wind, his cheeks a dark pink like meat cooked rare, his eyes almost glowing in the light of Hannibal's front room. "Hey," he says, quiet and fond, and gives Hannibal a smile.

Hannibal smiles back. "May I offer you something to drink?" he asks.

"Anything hot," Will replies, cupping his hands over his mouth and blowing on them. Bedelia looks impatient, but she cannot argue as Hannibal has turned and headed into his kitchen. He hears Bedelia's heels clicking behind him, and Will's heavier footsteps.

"I have tea or coffee," Hannibal says.

Will doesn't reply immediately, and Hannibal turns to see that Will's eyes are on the collar and mask on the counter. He hums, aggravated that Bedelia didn't move them. Tactless. Will clears his throat, raises his eyes, and gives a nonchalant shrug. "Whatever's easier."

Hannibal nods, and turns on one of the gas hobs, filling a tea kettle with water and setting it over the open flame. Will sits down on one of the bar stools, rubbing his hands lightly together and blowing on his knuckles as they turn pink.

He doesn't look at the mask and collar with what feels like all his might.

"How was the interview?" Hannibal asks, leaning back against the counter by the sink and folding his arms across his chest.

Will hums, his mouth curling in a gentle smile. "Easy," he replies. "Definitely our guy. Pretty much confessed as soon as we showed him the crime scene photos." He sighs, rubbing his hands over his head, through his hair, and rolls his shoulders. "He kept apologizing, like he had offended me."

"Perhaps you and Jack remind him of his parents," Hannibal says. "Sometimes I think you give off an air of disappointment, deliberately or not."

Will looks up, his eyebrows raised and his smile playful. "I can't imagine you are often on the receiving end of disappointment, Doctor Lecter."

Hannibal looks at Bedelia, who lowers her eyes. He hums and lifts his chin. "Do you think this man could have gone down a different path?" he asks, putting his mind back on the conversational topic at hand, and not how pretty Will looks when his cheeks are flushed and he's smiling, clearly more at ease now than he was even this morning.

Will hums, scratching at the edge of his beard, over his neck. His nails leave small pink lines over his tanned skin and Hannibal swallows, feeling his teeth itch again. Will's actions are not a deliberate ploy to draw Hannibal's attention to his exposed neck or his vulnerable throat, but just because they are not deliberate doesn't mean they are not effective. Hannibal has a hard time keeping his eyes on Will's, although every time he tries to make eye contact, Will lowers his gaze in another unconscious, appeasing move, and it just makes matters worse.

"Maybe," Will says, as the tea kettle starts to whine. Hannibal straightens and takes it off the heat. He grabs a mug and a teabag of a mint-lemongrass-green tea infusion, setting it in the bottom of the mug and pouring water over it.

He places the tea with a pot of sugar and a spoon in front of Will. Omegas have a much larger sweet tooth than that of Alphas or women, especially as they approach their heat.

Will blinks at it, like he's surprised, before he cups his hands around the mug with a grateful hum, gently swirling the water around so that the tea saturates it faster. "I think he could have been helped with something like therapy," he says, "if only to understand that his desires aren't wrong, and don't make him evil."

Bedelia gives a soft hum. "One might argue that sexual attraction to a member of your species, and creating a union through which no offspring is possible, is unnatural," she says. "It is easy to assign an 'evil' label to an unnatural thing."

"Being gay is no more unnatural than using a surrogate," Will replies sharply. It's like the words escape him without conscious thought, because he immediately goes tense, pressing his lips together, and keeps his eyes fixed laser-like on his mug when Bedelia glares at him.

Hannibal rubs his hand over his face to hide his smile. He cannot, however, control his purr in time before it rumbles in his chest. Bedelia cannot hear it, but he knows Will can. An Alpha purr is primarily designed to soothe and calm their Omega mates in time of stress, but it can also be brought on by great pleasure, amusement, or when in a relaxed state.

Will can hear that Hannibal is amused by his remark. Hannibal hopes, in the back of his brain, that Will takes it as encouragement. He quite likes seeing Will spar in a conversation on two sides. He wonders what Will would look like should any of this fighting become physical.

Dangerous thoughts, Doctor Lecter. The voice in his head sounds like Will, pleased and purring.

Will takes a sip of tea, wincing at the heat. He sets the mug back down and puts two heaping dollops of sugar in it, stirring it around so it dissolves. His eyes flash to the collar and mask, and then away.

Curious as to what his reaction will be, Hannibal walks over and picks up the mask, turning it in his hands so that he can see the innards. They are padded at the cheekpiece and under the chin, under the presumption that the person wearing it would try to strain against it with all their might.

Will blushes, swallowing harshly.

"This is a fine design," Hannibal says lightly. "Who made it?"

Will clears his throat. "Um. I did," he replies. He looks back down at his tea and spoons in another large amount of sugar. "And the collar."

"When?" Hannibal asks.

Will swallows. His fingers flex out and curl around his mug. "I've had them since -." He works his jaw from side to side and grits his teeth. "A long time," he finishes, and takes another long sip of tea, hissing at the heat.

Hannibal hums, setting the mask down. He thinks, if Will and Bedelia are going to insist on Will wearing this kind of thing, he would much prefer it to be clear, so that he can see Will's face. "Have you had to use them often?" he asks.

"I'd rather not talk about it, Doctor Lecter," Will replies tensely. "If that's alright."

Hannibal cocks his head to one side, and he lets out a quiet hum. "Of course," he says, although his chest is burning with curiosity now. "Bedelia tells me that you have already discussed wearing them, during your heat."

"Yes," Will replies. "It's the best solution, all-round. Ensures no pair bond will be created." He smiles, and it seems somewhat strained but only because Hannibal is watching him so closely. Will looks at Bedelia for a quick, quiet moment. "And that neither of us will get Voices."

Hannibal nods. Will sighs and takes another drink of his tea, and then pushes it away. "Well," he says, standing. "I suppose we'd better get started."

Hannibal raises his eyebrows, straightening up as Bedelia stands as well. Her smile is soft and eager, her eyes bright, and Hannibal himself feels some strange sense of elated anticipation as well. Bedelia leads the way up to the second bedroom, Will in the middle and Hannibal bringing up the rear. He's chasing Will, he's going to catch him, and *touch* him, and Will had teased him before about wanting to do it but Hannibal thinks he might be right.

His fingers curl and he runs his tongue over his teeth.

Bedelia opens the door to the guest bedroom. It is a modest space, with a twin-sized bed's headboard pressed against the back wall, extended towards the door. There is a closet in the corner and a dresser and bedside table along the wall, all made of dark, gleaming wood. The sheets are a pearl-white, and there is a window that allows a view of the drive way, parking lot, and road leading to the main highway.

Bedelia has brought a chair in and, after a moment, she sighs and takes a seat in the open corner behind the door. Hannibal herds Will inside, and shuts the door behind them all.

Will looks at her, swallowing and clenching his jaw. "Now, I understand this has the potential to become…awkward," Bedelia says, her smile pleased, like she delights in Hannibal and

Will's discomfort. "But I am merely here to make sure nothing untoward happens that threatens any of us. I encourage you both to proceed as though I am not here."

A difficult endeavor, given that she has a position that gives her a full view of almost anything that could happen, and her perfume is clogging up the air.

Playing is largely a hormonally-charged practice. Although this situation has implicit sexual elements, it is not always the case. Will has likely played before, with family members, or close friends. Within an intimate group of people, it might be the case that Alphas and Omegas might play with each other when unmated to provide them some semblance of the relief and satisfaction that the action of being knotted and mated with can bring. But this will be different, there is nothing platonic or friendly about this in the slightest.

Hannibal doesn't want there to be.

Will sucks in a slow, deep breath, and lifts his eyes to meet Hannibal's. He gives Hannibal a rare, soft smile, and swallows.

Hannibal's eyes widen when he hears Will whine. Omegas possess the ability to make sounds at a frequency only audible to Alphas, just as an Alpha's growl is designed to provoke a reaction in Omegas only. Will's whine is lovely, and tugs fiercely on Hannibal like a fish hook in his mouth. He reaches out and Will ducks his head, puts his cheek in Hannibal's palm, and curls his fingers in Hannibal's suit jacket.

Hannibal goes to him, crowding him up against the wall between the door and the dresser in front of which Bedelia is sitting. Will's pupils expand rapidly, Hannibal can see them from how close he is. He cups Will's face, drags his thumb along the pretty line of his cheekbone that he hopes, absently, his child will inherit, and Will's lips part.

He lets out another soft, plaintive whine, like Hannibal is denying him his favorite food. Will smells so incredibly sweet, now that Hannibal is up close to him. The mint and lemongrass in his scent is reflected by the hints of tea on his tongue.

Hannibal lets out a low growl and Will trembles, his breath hitching, and his eyes close as Hannibal leans in and licks into the sweet space between his lips. He catches Will's mouth, his hand sliding down to Will's neck, thumb sitting in the hollow of his throat and squeezing gently. There are pressure points here, sensitive and fine-tuned to an Alpha's touch. Hannibal wants to rip his teeth through all of them to make Will tremble.

Will gasps, a sweet moan stuck behind Hannibal's thumb. His fingers curl tighter in Hannibal's clothes, pulling him closer, and Will arches into him, parting his lips further to allow Hannibal's tongue room to taste him. Hannibal growls again, pressing his free arm against the wall, fist clenched. Blocking off an Omega's sightlines so that they are forced to only see, hear, and smell their Alpha has a powerful effect on an Omega, in-heat or not.

He pulls back for air, pleased and purring when Will opens his eyes and Hannibal can see the first sparks of gold glowing in them. He's affected by this, sweet and willing and desperate for Hannibal to touch and kiss him. Hannibal smiles, and leans in for another, and this time Will throws himself against Hannibal's hand on his throat, moaning softly when Hannibal

kisses him again. He nips at Hannibal's lower lip, lifting his chin for Hannibal to slide his hand up and cup the front of his neck. A tremor runs through him and Hannibal's head feels thick when he starts to smell Will's slick.

He pulls back, smiling at Will's plaintive whine, and slides his hand up to Will's hair, tugging sharply. Will's eyelids flutter and he hisses, the gold in his eyes thickening and growing dark, turning his irises a greener color. He's so absolutely lovely, eager and shaking already.

He puts his free hand on Will's shoulder and pulls him away from the wall, then across, turning him and forcing him to face the wall. His hand in Will's hair presses, until Will's forehead touches the wall and Will's hands flatten on it. His shoulders are heaving, sweat dampening his hair between Hannibal's fingers.

Hannibal growls and presses his body tightly to Will's, and Will gasps. "Oh, *God*," he moans, trembling when Hannibal cups his stomach with his free hand and forces Will to arch against him. Hannibal knows that Will can feel how hard he is, and the heat coming from him is maddening. Hannibal wants to strip him bare and taste every inch of him, savor him like a fine wine or a good meal.

He leans in, hand tightly fisted in Will's hair, and nuzzles at the back of his neck, where the most sensitive pressure points are protected by his tendon. During a normal mating, it is customary for an Alpha to bite their Omegas here, triggering the beginnings of a pair bond and releasing the hormones that allow them both to attain their Voices.

Hannibal opens his mouth wide and licks over the nape of Will's neck, sucking over the place where he would bite if Will was his. In his periphery, he sees Bedelia straighten, and hears her give a hum of warning.

Of course. No teeth.

His mouth is dry and he licks the beginnings of sweat from Will's skin, humming at the taste. He meets Bedelia's gaze and gives her a nod that he hopes is reassuring. In truth, it's all he can do not to growl at her and demand that she leave.

They agreed to this.

Will whimpers when Hannibal kisses the back of his neck again, and Hannibal's free arm locks around his chest, forcing Will against him as Hannibal rolls his hips, mimicking how he would move if he was buried deep in Will and soaked in his slick. He can smell how wet Will is, trembling and fine in Hannibal's hold.

Now comes the next stage: play talk. Words of praise, reassurance, and need designed to make Will desire and trust him. Hannibal leans in, nips oh-so-lightly at Will's ear, and Will turns his head, away from Bedelia and towards Hannibal, breathing hard.

Will whines, his red neck breaking out in goose bumps when Hannibal places another sucking kiss to his nape. "Hush, darling," he murmurs. Will's body sags, his knees unable to hold his weight, but Hannibal is here and keeps him upright. "I'm here. I'm going to take care of you."

"Alpha," Will breathes, and Hannibal lets out a soft growl. He resists the urge to correct Will, for the sake of their audience, but thinks it would be a mighty fine reward to break Will down so thoroughly that all he can say is Hannibal's name.

"You smell wonderful, Will," he whispers, and hopes that Bedelia cannot hear him clearly. This feels too intimate to share. He slides his hand down Will's chest and stomach, flattening it over his cock, and Will gasps, gritting his teeth and arching his entire body into Hannibal's touch. Hannibal has never play talked with Bedelia, and he has never mounted an Omega before, but the words seem to flow out of him as easily as blood from a severed artery; "I can feel how eager you are to breed for me." Will whimpers, rolling his hips, forcing his erection against Hannibal's palm. "Look at you, rutting against me like you're already in heat. Do I affect you that deeply?"

"*Yes*," Will gasps. His hands tighten to fists against the wall and he trembles, and Hannibal smiles, proud and purring to hear how desperate Will's voice has gotten already. He cannot speak to Will's sensitivity, but thinks he must be incredibly touch-starved, to already be so affected.

Will tilts his head, rubbing his jaw against Hannibal's mouth, and Hannibal rewards him with another kiss, releasing Will's hair and cupping his jaw so that their lips can meet. Will whimpers against him, reaching back with one hand to desperately claw at Hannibal's thigh, forcing them tighter together like Will can be mounted through their clothes.

Will gasps, parting from the kiss and leaning his sweaty forehead against the wall. It will leave a stain on the wall and Hannibal finds himself remarkably pleased by this idea. He covers Will, mimicking the pressure of being mounted, and Will trembles under his weight.

"Please," he gasps, teeth bared, eyes clenched tightly shut. Hannibal hums, nuzzling Will's nape again, and slides his free hand up to cup Will's throat. Will moans, a shudder running down his spine, his throat pressed tight to Hannibal's hand.

Will's slick-scent is thick now, completely covering Bedelia's perfume and the generic scent of the room. Hannibal growls and opens his mouth wide, edging his teeth along the tendons in the back of Will's neck, and Will goes tense with a broken, wrecked growl.

Hannibal closes his eyes, his nostrils flaring as Will trembles and Hannibal feels new heat, new wetness against his hand. Will shudders through his orgasm, gasping, using the wall like it's the only thing keeping him upright. His neck is red, blood rushing sweetly up as though begging Hannibal to taste it. Hannibal wants to. He wants to sink his teeth into Will's neck and mount him properly, audience be damned.

Perhaps the collar is a good idea, after all.

He waits until Will's knees lock, and pulls back. Will collapses against the wall, dazed and gasping, and whimpers when Hannibal's touch leaves him. Hannibal adjust himself, swallowing harshly, and sits on the edge of the bed to hide the shakiness in his own legs.

Will takes a deep breath, and when he turns around, he looks utterly ravished. His hair is all in disarray, his cheeks red, a dark stain on the front of his pants. His eyes are blisteringly

gold, burning when they meet Hannibal's and hold there.

His lips twitch in a smile. He rubs the back of his neck, eyelids fluttering at the pressure, and sighs, tilting his head back and exposing his throat. Hannibal growls and sees Will's body go weak with another tremor.

Bedelia stands abruptly, shattering the moment. "I'll see you out," she says, her tone and expression unreadable.

Will frowns at her. "No," he replies. "We're not done."

Bedelia arches one eyebrow.

Will gestures to Hannibal. "He needs to finish too," Will says. "If I suck him off, the hormones in his seed will help the process along."

…How crass. But Hannibal smiles.

Bedelia fixes him with a long look. She nods, and sits back down. "I'll allow it."

Will smiles, and sinks to his knees between Hannibal's thighs. And Hannibal can't help himself – he's eager, and he helps Will unfasten and unzip his suit pants, pushing the clothes to one side as Will braces his hands on Hannibal's thighs and Hannibal guides his cock between Will's lips.

Will sucks him down, eager and fine, and Hannibal puts a hand in his hair, pulling tight as he's surrounded by the heat and pressure of Will's mouth. He puts his nails in Will's neck and Will moans, throat spasming around Hannibal's cock as he tries to take all of Hannibal into his mouth.

His tongue slides thick and wet under Hannibal's cock, putting pressure there as he sucks and works his head to try and draw Hannibal to orgasm. Hannibal can feel every flex of his throat, see every shuddering breath of air he catches as he raises and lowers his head. He's desperate, thirsty, and Hannibal wants to satisfy him.

His gut clenches when Will moans, a whine stuck in his throat, blocked by Hannibal's cockhead. He bares his teeth and clenches his jaw when he feels his orgasm unwind in his stomach, and Will whimpers, cheeks hollowing as he sucks and swallows all of Hannibal's seed. He drinks it down readily, his nails tight in Hannibal's thighs, like he needs it just as much as Hannibal does.

When he pulls off, Hannibal acts on instinct. He takes Will by the neck and pulls him up into a kiss, humming at the taste of himself on Will's tongue. And Will answers him eagerly, his hands turning gentle and running up Hannibal's thighs as he arches up and kisses Hannibal back, his lower lip trapped between Hannibal's teeth.

When they part again, Will's eyes are still glowing gold, but fading now, blue overtaking them again. His mouth is red and abused, split-slick and ripe, and Hannibal thinks that Will might be one of the most beautiful things he's ever seen.

He lets Will go, and Will stands, wiping the back of his hand over his mouth. He seems much steadier, and Hannibal cannot say the same for himself. He tucks his cock back into his clothes and fixes them, and he and Bedelia stand at the same time.

Bedelia hums. "Satisfied?" she asks.

Will huffs, smiling like he has to do it to hide the fact that he's baring his teeth. "Just trying to be efficient," he says. His voice is raw and hoarse, and Hannibal purrs softly in pleasure, knowing that it was through him that Will is so grievously affected.

Bedelia doesn't respond, and the three of them return to the kitchen. Will finishes his tea, lukewarm now, and Hannibal walks him to the door. Will puts on his coat, and turns to regard him. "Jack wanted me to invite you to his office tomorrow," he says. Hannibal tilts his head to one side and Will smiles, softer now. Satisfied. "I believe he thinks your presence made me sharper, today. He thinks I want to impress you."

"Well," Hannibal replies. "Do you?"

"That implies that I have any emotional investment in impressing you," Will returns, his smile widening, playful and coy. "Do you think that is the case?"

"It would be natural for you to desire my regard," Hannibal says coolly. "And for me to desire yours. Neither of us would breed with the other if there was not a certain level of mutual trust and respect."

Will looks at him for a moment. His eyes drop to Hannibal's mouth, and he bites his lower lip and then licks it. Hannibal wonders if Will can still taste Hannibal on his tongue. "Perhaps not," he replies. Then, he shakes his head and turns away. "I'll see you both tomorrow night," he says, louder, and Hannibal knows that Bedelia was watching them.

He smiles. "Goodnight, Will," he says, and closes the door behind him.

He returns to the kitchen to clear Will's mug, finding Bedelia sitting on one of the bar stools. She looks up when he passes by, her fingers nervously toying with each other. "Did you have to kiss him?" she asks, sounding sullen.

"The hormones in my saliva will coax him into heat much faster than normal," Hannibal replies. He smiles. "It's for the sake of our future, my love."

Bedelia hums, and although Hannibal is not lying, he cannot help feeling like he has. Because, in truth, Hannibal kissed Will because he wanted to. He touched and spoke to Will like that because he wanted to. He wanted to bite Will.

His eyes fall to the collar and mask on the counter, and he swallows.

"I would like you to spend the night," he says.

Bedelia's eyebrows rise, and she smiles. "Did he wind you up that much, my love?" she asks. She laughs before he can answer.

"Doctor Hanscomb still suggested that we might conceive the natural way," Hannibal replies. "It doesn't hurt to try."

Bedelia nods. She seems pleased by the reminder, as though afraid that Hannibal might forget about her entirely. "Of course," she says, and reaches out to squeeze Hannibal's hand.

Chapter 4

Although they have been married many years, and Alphas have been known to bite their wives and gain Voices out of it, Hannibal has never bitten Bedelia. He thinks if she could get away with it, she would require him to wear a mask of his own to get rid of the temptation altogether.

His mind is burning when he lays with her. Her scent is musky and perfumed, like she's trying to cover up the scent of her blood and flesh when Hannibal kisses her and puts his hands on her. She is a relatively passive lover, given that she has no biological compulsion to drop to her knees at the right touch, and he cannot compel her with his Voice to do whatever he commands. When Hannibal mates with her, she touches him eagerly, her hands pressed flat to his shoulders and her legs parted to give him room.

Women generally cannot be knotted, or at least a knot cannot stay inside of them unless they are incredibly tight – and, in Hannibal's opinion, too dry. He considers it a triumph when she's too wet for his knot to stay in; it means he has done his duty in bringing her pleasure. Her orgasms are quiet and when he's finished, she's flushed and bright-eyed with endorphins and serotonin.

He cradles her in his arms as they rest. She will likely leave the house after this and drive to her own, unless Hannibal can convince her to go another round. Which is unlikely. When the lights are low and they're both sweating, she's all-too aware of the predator in her bed and usually chooses to flee from it after they are both sated.

As they lay there, Hannibal cannot help thinking of Will. Mounting an Omega will be different, of this he is absolutely certain. His brief play session with Will has already ignited instincts and desires in him that, if they weren't there before, have certainly been latent until this point. He wants to put his nose to Bedelia's neck and suck a mark over her pulse. He wants to turn her around and put her on her hands and knees – both things he knows she would absolutely not consent to.

Will would consent to it. He'd do whatever it took to get Hannibal's knot, especially during his heat. His whine is so lovely, and Hannibal is certain he could make Will purr, and growl, and make all kinds of desperate noises that Bedelia does not or cannot make. Bedelia is 'Lie back and think of England', and Will is 'Storm the beaches and take no prisoners'.

He wonders if, after Bedelia has a child in her arms, she *would* allow Hannibal to take Will as a second mate.

Dangerous thoughts.

She sighs, and goes tense when Hannibal pulls her close to his chest and kisses her ear. He bites back the urge to speak to her in the way he would speak to Will – the words flow across the front of his eyes like reading a book, and he wants to give them a voice. He wants to destroy Will with them.

She turns within his arms and gently pushes him back with a hand on his chest. "I should go," she murmurs, and kisses Hannibal chastely before he can protest.

"Let me walk you out," Hannibal says with a nod of acceptance.

Her smile widens. "Thank you."

He rises and allows her time to dress, donning a pair of soft lounge pants and a t-shirt, before he walks her down to his front door. As they pass the guest bedroom, he takes in a deep breath through his parted jaws, pleased when he can still smell Will lingering in the air.

Bedelia takes her coat and purse and turns to smile at him again. She cups his face and gives him another kiss.

"I'll be back when Will is here to play again," she says quietly, and Hannibal nods.

"Drive safely, my love," he says, and waits until she is in her car before he closes the door.

He goes back up to the upper floor, and pauses when he reaches the door to the guest bedroom again. He takes in another deep breath, growling low when the scent of Will's slick hits the scenting palette on the roof of his mouth.

His fingers clench. *Dangerous thoughts, Doctor Lecter,* Will's voice purrs in his head.

But thoughts are just thoughts.

He goes into the room.

It is unchanged. There's a crease in the bedcover where he had sat while Will used his mouth on Hannibal. He takes his place there again and his eyes immediately find the small, *very small*, dark stain on the wall where Will's sweaty forehead touched it.

He closes his eyes and brings up an image of Will in front of him; his dark curls and golden eyes. Will is beautiful, and strong, so unlike the dainty toys Bedelia would have tried to get him to mount. In his mind's eye, Will smiles and holds out a hand to him, beckoning him closer.

Hannibal goes. He stands and presses his forearm and fist on the wall above Will's head, rests his forehead against his arm and imagines it's Will's, imagines that he has one of Will's wrists in his hand, Will's heat and strength pressed tight to his chest.

He breathes in deeply and catches the scent of Will's sweat. His chest is burning and he presses the heel of his free hand against his cock as it starts to thicken and harden in his pants. He imagines Will is here, and can smell him, remembers the swift and shaky way he'd breathed in and clutched at Hannibal with something like desperation.

"You beautiful boy," Hannibal whispers, and shoves his pants down to fist his cock tightly. He can smell Will, almost as well as if Will were right here in the room with him. His upper lip twitches, curls back to bare his teeth. He wants to sink his teeth into Will's neck, wants to

taste his sweat and his blood and Hannibal desperately wants to know what sound he makes when he's bitten.

He wants Will up against the wall like this again, facing him this time. He wants to rut his cock against Will's bare stomach, mark him there with the wetness that will gather at the head of his cock. He wants to fall to his knees and taste Will at his center, where he's the most vulnerable and open. He wants Will on his knees, wants to shove his knot behind Will's teeth and force him to drink everything Hannibal has to offer.

He wants to taste Will's sweat, his slick, and his seed. He would devour Will as readily as any meal, rip him to shreds to find the parts of him that are most delicate and most flavorful. He wants to bare all of Will's skin and mark it, bite and suck bruises onto him that will never fade. Will attracts him like a hummingbird to a flower; he wants to suckle at Will's neck and mount him with a fervor that feels like war.

His knees shake as he twists his hand, growling and jerking his hips forward like there's something warm and wet to sink into. An Omega's slick is thinner than a woman's, purely for the sake of getting an Alpha deep inside of them. He imagines Will on his hands and knees, chest pressed to the bed, knuckles white in the sheets. He imagines knotting Will and pulling out to lick up the mess he made inside of him for just long enough for Will to demand his presence again. Will would not let Hannibal rest, not for a second, until he was sure he was pregnant.

Hannibal's gut clenches and he snarls. Will can hear when he growls, and snarls, and purrs. He wants to do all three, fill Will's head with static and white noise. Will's head will be full of him, as completely clouded as smoke or fog. Hannibal will not tolerate anything less.

He aches to touch Will again. Despite knowing it will be an event with an audience, he wants to know the feeling of Will's skin under his hands. He needs to know if Will has scars, or other hidden marks – perhaps his line of duty got him injured, years ago. Maybe there's a scar from a knife wound in his back. Maybe there's a knot of angry muscle from an injury that never quite got the therapy it deserved. Hannibal needs to know – he needs to know in the same desperate way he needs to know what Will sounds like when he's knotted and how his eyes look when they're completely gold.

He shudders, picturing Will on the bed, whimpering in desperation for Hannibal's knot. He imagines Will with a Voice, compelling Hannibal to breed with him. He imagines what it would feel like – all the journals he's read have cited that a Voice feels like a physical tug in one's chest, the same as starvation or dire thirst. In Alphas, it drives them half-mad with the need to protect and consume the Omega below them. With Omegas, allowing an Alpha to use their Voice on them is the ultimate gesture of trust and love, and they will become frantic with the need to satisfy that Alpha's desires.

Hannibal is very intrigued to know what Will would do, with a Voice in his head and thickening his throat.

Hannibal's orgasm almost catches him by surprise. He could not pinpoint which exact thought triggered the final step, the last thing that needed to be thought about before his

release. He catches as much as he can on his hand, humming when some of his seed stains the wall under Will's sweat.

Then, he pulls back, and eyes the bed. He tugs the duvet cover down and smears what's left on the sheets. When he gets Will in this bed – tonight, he'll rut with him tonight through their clothes, force Will into the mounting position and drive him wild with it – Will is going to smell Hannibal's seed here.

He smiles as he fixes the duvet cover back in place.

"You seem different today."

Hannibal raises his eyebrows, regarding Alana over their meal. They're in the cafeteria of the FBI University, and Alana has a salad sitting in front of her. Hannibal brought his meal from home. Two cups of coffee sit between them, gently steaming. The cafeteria is completely empty since it's well past the normal time for lunch.

He tilts his head to one side and takes another bite of his meal. "How so?" he asks.

She hums and shrugs one shoulder. Her nails drum against the edge of her coffee cup before she takes a sip. "I don't know. Lost in thought." She pauses, and hums. "Is everything going okay?"

Hannibal smiles. "'Everything' in general, or a very specific 'everything'?"

She rolls her eyes, showing her teeth in an amused, fondly-exasperated smile. "Fine. How are you and Bedelia handling Will?"

"An interesting choice of words," Hannibal replies lightly. "Handling implies that there is some wildness or danger about him."

"You are mounting an Omega at the behest of your wife, for the sake of fathering a child," Alana says. "That whole situation screams 'Chaotic'."

Hannibal smiles. "Perhaps," he replies, "but Bedelia and I have always been practical people. And Will is proving to be remarkably accommodating."

"Not that remarkable," Alana says. "I knew he would be."

"You have been friends with him for quite some time."

"Yes," Alana says, nodding. "I actually met him just after my residency under your tutelage. He was doing research at the time on his own papers, and working as a teacher's aide. We became friends." She pauses. "He has no legal guardian. As a result I find myself protective of him. I consider him one of my closest friends and, if it came to it, I would place myself as his guardian for his protection."

"And has it ever come to that?" Hannibal asks. "Or close?"

Alana hesitates, and tries to hide it by taking another sip of her coffee. She eats some of her salad and Hannibal allows her to stew. Finally; "Why do you ask?"

Hannibal sighs, sitting back. "Bedelia showed me Will's mask and collar," he says. Alana blinks, her expression the kind of carefully schooled that is a result of people trying not to show their reaction. Her jaw clenches, though, giving her away. "Will himself told me he has owned them for a long time. And now you sit here, implying that there might be some darkness in Will that he does not want everyone else to see. Something that may need to be… handled."

Alana presses her lips together and drops her eyes. "I'm not sure what I'm supposed to say, here."

"You may speak honestly with me," Hannibal says. "I feel the urge to tell you that I think it would be very deceitful of you, if you knew something about Will that might endanger me, my wife, or my future child, and didn't warn me." He pauses. "But I also understand that Will is your friend, and he trusts you to keep his secrets. So, I encourage you to share whatever you know about him that is already public opinion."

She hums, one eyebrow arching. "And here I was, under the impression that you wanted to keep your distance from him," she says.

Hannibal hums. "In this instance, I feel I might not have a choice," he says. "I accompanied Will to a crime scene yesterday and met Jack Crawford. I watched Will profile a crime scene – and you were right; he is very talented. It was quite something to watch." Alana smiles. "And Jack has invited me here, today, to meet with him. I'm worried he may insist that I monitor Will's psychological wellbeing while he does his work."

"If you're worried, that means you want to," Alana says. "But you also want to refuse."

"I am a happily married man, Alana, and this situation, however well-arranged, is going to cause friction. Especially if most of my personal and professional time is being catered to Will's needs."

Alana doesn't answer.

"I am pleased to hear that Will doesn't have a legal guardian, though," Hannibal adds. "I had considered it a possibility, and feared it may be Agent Crawford. Knowing he doesn't have one removes the possibility of further complications."

"Yes," Alana says coolly, "we certainly couldn't risk another Alpha getting in the way."

Hannibal regards her and she takes a bite of her salad, avoiding his gaze. He hums and straightens up, setting his fork down and folding his hands together on the edge of the table. "Did you and Will ever have a relationship, Alana?" he asks. "A physical one?"

She shakes her head, sighing like she expected the question. "No," she replies. "We kissed once. It was after a play session. I wanted to see what it was like. But we both knew we couldn't make each other happy, in that respect."

"Does Margot know?"

"Yes." Alana smiles. "It was well before her time, Hannibal."

"Did he wear the mask and collar while you did it?"

She frowns, surprised by the question. "No," she says. She tilts her head to one side. "Have you played with him yet?" Hannibal nods. "Did he wear them, then?"

"No," Hannibal replies. "Play requires access to the mouth and the neck. I…will admit, the existence of these items troubles me. I cannot think of a single reason why he would own such things."

"Did you ask him?"

"Yes," Hannibal says. "He said he'd rather not talk about it."

"And so you came to me instead," Alana replies smoothly, smiling, but something bitter on the edges of it. "You know, you and Jack are very alike sometimes. I'm hoping it's just something about being an Alpha and I don't have to reconsider my friendship with you."

"A bold statement," Hannibal says. "What about my behavior is so like Jack's?"

"If you don't get the answer you want, you try and trick it out of others, or force the issue," Alana says. "People are allowed to have secrets, Hannibal, and to decide when and to whom they will reveal those secrets. I'm sure you do."

Hannibal smiles. Yes, that is certainly true.

"I did not mean to offend you," he says kindly. "I apologize."

She huffs, but gives him a nod. "I love Will very much, Hannibal," she says, steely-eyed. Since she became a mother, her protective instincts have tripled from what they already were when Hannibal first met her. She has always had the fierce, fiery love of a mother in her heart. "I know that you will treat him with respect and courtesy. If I didn't know that, I wouldn't have let you meet him. I'm relying on your character, here, as I know it."

"I would never betray your trust in me, Alana," Hannibal replies. She regards him for another long moment, before her icy exterior melts and her face softens into something more neutral.

Her clock beeps as time ticks into three in the afternoon, and she checks it. "Didn't you need to meet Jack now?" she asks.

"Yes," Hannibal says, and stands. His appointment is in fifteen minutes and he wouldn't want to be late. He gathers up his food and packs it into his bag and gives her another small smile.

"You and Margot should come to dinner again, this weekend," he says. "I think it would be good for all of us to become more friendly with each other."

Alana smiles. "Sure," she says. "I'll let you know when we're free."

"Excellent," Hannibal adds. "Oh, and perhaps you should bring Morgan."

Alana pauses, frowning. She blinks up at Hannibal. "…Morgan?" she repeats. "You hardly want a child at your dinner table, Hannibal."

"I think it would be nice," Hannibal replies lightly. "But I leave it to your discretion."

She nods, and he leaves the cafeteria.

Will is sitting outside of Jack's office door, and looks up as Hannibal approaches. His eyes rake down Hannibal's body once, quickly, and he presses his lips together and sits up a little straighter when Hannibal takes a seat next to Will. There are other seats he could have chosen, that would have put space between them, but Hannibal likes how Will goes somewhat tense and draws his shoulders up like Hannibal is going to attack his neck.

Will picks at the edges of his sweater, his eyes sharp and focused on his hands. He seems otherwise completely calm – none of the jitters that Hannibal has become used to seeing are present in his demeanor. "You're looking well," he says.

Will's mouth twitches at the corner, like it didn't decide before moving whether it was going to be a smile or a frown. "Yeah," he replies. "I, ah, slept really well last night."

"As did I," Hannibal says. He smiles when Will looks at him. His eyes are a lovely green today, and there are a few flecks of gold still remaining from last night. He's not wearing glasses, and even without those on he looks much younger, more vulnerable. Hannibal forces his eyes not to drop to Will's neck. "It's remarkable what even some deviance from a routine can do."

Will swallows thickly, looking down at his hands again.

"We didn't get a chance to talk about the whole process, before or after," Hannibal murmurs.

Will goes tense. "You really think this is the place to do it?" he replies sharply.

"Would you prefer somewhere else?" Hannibal asks. "I'm happy to accommodate."

"Just keep it professional," Will says.

"Or we could socialize like adults."

Will huffs a bitter-sounding laugh. He looks at Hannibal like Hannibal has just said something incredibly stupid. "Now, Doctor Lecter," he murmurs, his voice almost a purr; "What would your wife think? Or the neighbors?"

"If you're implying that we cannot be friendly because of Bedelia, I would respectfully disagree," Hannibal replies coolly. Then; "Did she say as much?"

"I told you," Will says, "she cannot control her own child-bearing ability, so she must control me. Through controlling me, she controls you." He cocks his head to one side, his smile widening. The cat that found the cream. "Don't tell me you thought that our negotiations ended at the contract."

"There were things merely verbally agreed upon, yes," Hannibal says with a nod. He tries to ignore the sense of clarity that comes with Will's declaration. Bedelia cannot control him, but controlling *Will* is another matter entirely, and something she can most certainly do.

Or try to, at least.

"I try to live in strictly-defined parameters, Doctor Lecter," Will says quietly. "I don't appreciate you trying to change them now."

"I find my position curiously reversed, even from last week," Hannibal says coolly. "I seem to recall being the only one in all parties with any sense of hesitation, and now I find resistance on all sides. I am being called to lead the charge and yet my troops are nowhere to be found."

Will smiles, sly and teasing. "Do you see this as a war, Doctor Lecter?" he asks.

Hannibal doesn’t get the chance to answer, as Jack's office door opens and he greets them with a sharp nod. Will stands and Hannibal follows him into Jack's office and Jack closes the door behind them, and then all three of them take their seats. "Doctor Lecter, thank you for coming," he says. Again, not acknowledging Will. Not in a deliberate slight, Hannibal senses, but because Jack assumes that Will is a given. He simply is, in the same way he simply *is*, when he's with Hannibal.

"Of course, Agent Crawford," Hannibal says, sitting back and placing his bag on the floor next to his seat. Will is slouching, his knees spread and his shoulders up like a petulant teenager, his eyes on Jack's nameplate. "How may I help you?"

Jack's eyes flash to Will, then back to Hannibal. "I'm not sure if Will told you – we caught the man who murdered the Alpha in the sauna; the crime scene you accompanied Will to." Hannibal nods, smiling faintly as he remembers how lovely Will had looked, dark and prowling and entrenched in the mind of the killer.

"I told him," Will says. "Told him about the interview, too."

Jack nods, and then his eyebrows rise and he looks between the two of them again. Hannibal sees his nostrils flare as he subtly scents the air, and he smiles. Will isn't putting out any pheromones beyond his normal Omega scent, and Hannibal had made sure his own scent was

without offense, knowing where he'd be spending his day. Jack won't smell anything between them.

For the sake of professionalism.

"There's been a case we've been working on for a while now," Jack says, sitting back. "I've been having Will consult on it. I was hoping to get your opinion, as well."

Hannibal tilts his head to one side and Jack hands him a folder. It's thick, and inside are several photographs of teenage girls affixed with a paperclip. There are reports for them being missing – nothing for a coroner, he notices.

"No bodies?" he asks.

"No bodies, nothing that comes out of bodies, no body parts." Jack shakes his head. "Nothing. Will…" He sighs. "Will seems to be under the impression that he's eating these girls."

Hannibal pauses, and carefully turns over another page in the file. "A cannibal? A interesting breed of psychopathy."

"He's not a psychopath," Will says archly. His knuckles are white on the armrests of the chair and he looks tense and angry. Hannibal can see where his jaw is clenching when he looks at Will. "He cares about them."

"This one has a body," Hannibal says. "Elise Nichols."

Jack nods. "He brought her home and tucked her into bed after he killed her."

"She had liver cancer," Will says. "He couldn't eat her, so he put her back. Honorably."

Hannibal hums. "If that is the case, it would certainly lend credence to the cannibal theory, Jack. I see no reason to doubt Will's analysis." He looks up and remembers Alana's words. "Unless, of course, that's not an answer you wish to accommodate."

"If he's killing these girls and eating them, he's a psychopath. No one who could feel things would do something like that," Jack says coolly. Hannibal senses that he and Will have had this argument many times before.

"He *does* care for these girls. Or at least one of them," Will says. "One of them is his golden ticket. One of them means more than the others do."

Same height, same weight, same hair and eye color. Blue-eyed and dark hair. Like Morgan Verger. Like, Hannibal hopes, his own son will inherit from his mother. "He certainly has a type," Hannibal murmurs. "And if they're all abducted on Fridays, it means he needs the weekend to do whatever he's doing to them. He will have a house, and perhaps a cabin to take these girls while he dismembers and consumes them."

Jack hums. "Will, would you mind giving us the room for a moment?" he asks.

Will presses his lips together, and stands. "I'll just go," he says. "I have to go give a lecture. And clearly you value Doctor Lecter's opinion more than my own." He says it without bitterness or contempt – nothing Jack would instinctively react to. He is an Alpha, after all. Will leaves without another word, closing the door, and Jack heaves a sigh.

Hannibal smiles and closes the folder. "I hope I am not causing any tension, here," he says.

Jack waves his hand dismissively. "Will doesn't like it when other people play in his sandbox," he says, and Hannibal isn't sure that that's correct. He doesn't mind sharing space; he minds being forced into the corner and overlooked. As do most men.

"I think he might be threatened if you called me in to verify every one of his interpretations," Hannibal replies.

"Threatened?" Jack repeats.

"You are an Alpha who works closely with him, Jack. As an Omega, he might feel compelled to please and satisfy you. I threaten his ability to do this. He might fear you will lose whatever regard you have for him."

"I doubt Will's self-esteem is so easily shaken," Jack says darkly. Hannibal wonders if there's history behind that statement. "Nevertheless, I had to be sure. Will is…sensitive, Doctor Lecter. He gets into the minds of serial killers and sometimes I worry about what follows him when he steps out of it."

"I don't think the inclination to commit murder is contagious, like a disease," Hannibal replies lightly. "Either you have it or you don't, and you do it, or you don't."

Jack hums, considering Hannibal for a long moment. "If I may ask, Doctor Lecter, what exactly is your relationship with Will?" he asks. Hannibal smiles; he expected this question. "He said he was already in your company when you came with him to the crime scene."

"Yes," Hannibal says. "Alana introduced us."

"Recently?" Hannibal nods. "So you are acquaintances."

"We keep our relationship professional, yes," Hannibal replies, since this is technically the case. Will agreeing to being a surrogate is a contract arrangement and nothing more. "That is from both Will's side and my own."

Jack hums, rubbing a hand over his mouth. "Good," he says, and Hannibal tilts his head to one side. "I would like to ask you to give me a profile of Will."

Hannibal raises his eyebrows, and sets the folder down on Jack's desk. "What he has is pure empathy," Hannibal says. "He can assume your point of view, or mine, or anyone that you point him towards. Even, if necessary, the point of view of serial killers. It's an uncomfortable gift, Jack."

"Discomfort aside," Jack says, "is it dangerous?"

"I would encourage you to see it as useful," Hannibal replies. "As Will wants you to see it. And if I may ask – why now? Will told me he's been doing this for you for quite some time."

Jack nods. "Call it a lack of resources," he replies. "I never had someone willing to do it for me, or able."

"Not Alana?"

"I asked her and she refused. She has a 'professional curiosity' for him, and will go no farther."

Hannibal hums. "You know that Will is biologically the mother of Alana's child?" he asks, and Jack nods. "I would suggest their relationship is far from professional, Agent Crawford."

"I agree," Jack replies. Then, he sighs. "Thank you, Doctor Lecter, that's all I really wanted to ask you. I appreciate you giving me your time."

"Not at all," Hannibal says, standing as Jack does. "I consider it a personal pleasure to be at the service of the FBI. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me if you would like me to consult again."

"I'll remember that," Jack says, and shakes his hand. "Thank you."

Hannibal finds Will in an empty lecture hall. Will goes tense, immediately feeling Hannibal's eyes on his back, and turns. His expression is impassive, but cold, and he turns back and goes back to putting papers and files into his briefcase. "Can I help you?" he asks.

"I thought you were teaching," Hannibal says.

Will shakes his head. "Sometimes people make up excuses to leave uncomfortable situations, Doctor Lecter," he replies, and straightens with a sigh. He turns back around and stops, finding that Hannibal hasn't moved. He's blocking the door. "I hope Jack made you an offer you couldn't refuse."

"Will, this hostility is unwarranted. I have no intention of encroaching on your territory or diminishing your usefulness to Jack."

"What makes you think I feel threatened by you?" Will demands. "You would only say that if the thought crossed your mind."

"Well…" Hannibal shrugs. "I suppose I'm simply intrigued. You are an interesting person – not just because of the personal agreement between us, but because of your biology, your career path, and your mental gifts. I won't apologize for taking interest in something that is interesting."

"You talk about me like I'm a rare museum display," Will mutters, and walks past Hannibal, brushing past him on his way out the door. Hannibal follows, giving a tame chase. "Come one, come all! Uncle Jack has brought out his shiny toy again!"

"Do you find delight in calling yourself a plaything, hoping I might disagree with you?" Hannibal asks.

Will pauses, and turns his head when Hannibal becomes level with him. "I am a plaything," he says. "That's a pure fact. You *play* with me."

Hannibal smiles. Will swallows and starts walking again. He sighs as they leave the building, pulling his coat tighter around himself. "Well, you said you wanted to talk," he says. "Talk."

"Would you like to come to dinner?" Hannibal asks. "Bedelia will likely not join us until after. It would give us a chance to speak freely, without caring who is watching or listening. On neutral ground."

Will huffs, and his smile is lopsided and bitter. "We will never be on neutral ground, Doctor Lecter," he replies. But he nods. "Sure. I'll come to dinner. When should I stop by?"

"Let's say six," Hannibal replies, checking his watch. It's almost three thirty, which will give him plenty of time to gather new meat to serve Will. "Do you have an opinion on food?"

"I'm sure it'll be delicious, whatever you make."

"That's not what I asked."

Will pauses, hesitating. He swallows and shrugs lightly. "No opinion," he replies. "I like rare steak and whiskey. Neither of which I feel are in your wheelhouse."

Interesting. The whiskey is not the typical drink choice for Omegas, as it does not cater to their sweet tooth. The meat is more normal, as Omegas commonly need an excess of protein to counter-balance their heat cycles. "I'll see what I can do," Hannibal says, smiling warmly. Will nods, once, sharply and decided, and gets into his car.

He ends up serving steaks made from the ribeye cuts of a rude TSA agent he had earmarked several months prior, when he and Bedelia had spent their anniversary in Florence. The man's meat has a lovely marbling and a thick layer of fat that he crisps, and serves the meat with baked and stuffed green peppers. He chooses a smoky wine that has been aged in whiskey barrels – a concession for both himself and Will.

Will arrives promptly at six and Hannibal greets him with a smile, gesturing for him to go the dining room while Hannibal brings out the meal. Will smiles when he sees it, and at Hannibal's explanation of choice of whine, and he huffs a fond laugh.

"How accommodating," he notes, and takes a sip. He hums, frowning at the flavor, sucking a breath in through his teeth. "Wow. This is…surprisingly good," he says.

Hannibal nods, lifting the glass to his nose to take a long inhale, before he takes a sip himself. "You're encouraging me to branch out," he murmurs.

Will hums, and waits until Hannibal starts to eat before tucking into his own meal. He lets out a pleased noise at the taste, a purr stuck in his chest for a brief moment before it's broken by his swallow. He blushes, and Hannibal decides not to mention it for the sake of Will's nerves.

After a moment, Will clears his throat. "Alana told me you two had lunch today," he says. Hannibal nods and Will looks at the copious amounts of food on both their plates. "Still hungry?"

Hannibal smiles. "There is always room for the finer indulgences in life," he says. "And as you said before – cooking is a selfish act for me. But it is also calming."

"Are you in distress?" Will asks, and takes another bite of steak.

"Not so much in distress, as in entropy," Hannibal replies coolly. Will lifts his eyebrows. "I find myself every hour since I met you in a new situation, with all the new navigations and rules to adhere to. So, too, do I not want to step on anyone's toes, and I seek harmony in all my relationships. In that respect, I feel that I am failing."

"If you're having marital troubles, I'd rather not know," Will says darkly. "But I would ask that you end this arrangement before it goes any further, if you are."

"No such threat exists," Hannibal says, smiling. "You are paranoid."

"I have a lot more to lose from this arrangement than you do," Will says. "If I get pregnant and something happens, I won't end the pregnancy. But I will also get nothing in terms of financial recompense. And you are under no obligation to claim the child, and Bedelia would be unable to if you got a divorce. So, I think I'm right in being paranoid."

"If you are so aware of the potential threats, why enter into this engagement at all?" Hannibal asks. "That is one question only you can answer, and I give you power in admitting that I am desperate to hear it."

Will smiles slowly. "How about we turn this into a game?" he asks, eyes bright. Hannibal cocks his head to one side. "A game of observation. I will say something about you I believe to be true. If I'm wrong, I will answer any question you pose to me, regardless of how much I do or do not want to answer it. And I will answer it truthfully."

"And if you are correct?"

"Then I get the satisfaction of knowing I was right," Will replies coolly. "And it will be you turn to make an assumption."

Hannibal smiles. "Alright."

Will sits back in his chair, regarding Hannibal for a long moment. His eyes move from Hannibal's, to his mouth, to his hands, and then back up. "You enjoy your solitude," he says, and Hannibal raises his eyebrows, because he thinks that's a pretty obvious fact. "But you were not always alone. I think you were very close to someone, in your youth. A family member, or a friend. A female. You hold her in very high regard."

Hannibal swallows, takes a sip of his wine, and nods. "You are correct," he says, looking down at his plate. "I had a sister."

Will frowns. "Had?" he repeats.

Hannibal nods again. "Yes," he says. "I lost her when I was still an adolescent."

"I'm sorry," Will murmurs, shaking his head, his eyes dark with grief. Knowing what Hannibal knows about Will, he imagines that Will can intimately understand that kind of loss through Hannibal's eyes. "What was her name?" he asks.

"Mischa," Hannibal replies, his voice hoarse.

Will nods again. "Your turn, Doctor Lecter," he says, and takes another bite of his meal.

Hannibal hums, considering what he knows about Will, and what he thinks is good and yet private enough to count as an observation. "I think you are in love with Alana," he says. Will blinks at him. "Or you were, at some point. I think that you would do absolutely anything in your power to make her happy, up to and including breeding with a stranger simply because she asked you to."

Will smiles, showing his teeth. "Do you think my worth is valued so lowly that I would breed just because my friend asked me to?"

"I'm sure there's personal gain in it somewhere, something I have yet to figure out," Hannibal replies coolly. "But was I right about the first part?"

Will swallows, and he nods. "I did love her," he says quietly. "But the way someone might love a work of art, or their favorite song. The room fills with light when I see her, but I knew she would never be mine, and I would never be hers."

"Why is that, may I ask?"

Will smiles, sad and fond. "There are parts of me I would never ask her to bear with," he says.

Hannibal accepts that with a thoughtful hum. How strange, that Will would not force the unseemly parts of himself on another, and Hannibal delights in making Bedelia bear his. "I believe it's your turn to observe something about me," he murmurs, and takes another sip of wine.

Will nods, his eyes roving over Hannibal's face again. Then, he looks away – to the horns mounted on the walls, the darkly shining fireplace, the painting of *Leda and the Swan* above the mantle. He licks his lips and hums into his next drink.

"I think you are a sadistic man, Doctor Lecter," he murmurs.

Hannibal raises his eyebrows. "That's a matter of opinion," he replies. "You think I take pleasure in suffering?"

"You take pleasure in knowing you can make someone suffer," Will returns. "That is why you are a healer. The power and control you maintain over someone is entirely a subject of your own whim. You can choose to do no harm, or do grievous amounts of harm in equal measure."

Hannibal blinks at him, and Will meets his eyes. Then, he smiles, slowly, and Will mirrors it. "Are you profiling me, Will?" he asks, fond and affectionate.

"Returning the favor," Will says. He sets his wine glass down and finishes his meal, his plate clear. He sets his fork and knife down as well and sits back with a pleased sigh. He appears so relaxed and fine, at home in Hannibal's dining room – and his guest room, and his study, and anywhere else Hannibal could think to put him. Clearly, when it's just him and Hannibal, Will has no issue with speaking freely. Hannibal would almost call this flirting. "You haven't stopped profiling me since the moment you saw me. Nor have I stopped profiling you, and your wife. It's not just something we can turn off."

"So, you call me sadistic. Solitary. And in a high-demand work environment," Hannibal murmurs. "Those sound like the earmarks of a psychopath. Do you think I am a psychopath, Will?"

"If you are, so am I," Will replies. Not a denial. Not a confession, either. Hannibal's smile widens. He *likes* this. He likes playing this verbal cat-and-mouse game with Will, neither side giving nor taking ground until the throat is exposed. Then, Will's smile sharpens. "If you deny that you are a sadist, then that means my assumption was wrong. So you get to ask me a question."

What a clever boy. Giving Hannibal the in point he wants without forcing Hannibal to demand it, nor losing power by having it forced out of him. Will's kindness is given like a treat to a dog, and Hannibal is eager to eat from his hand.

Hannibal pauses, and Will cocks his head to one side. "Well?" he asks.

"I want to know about the mask and collar. I want to know why you agreed to be a surrogate for us. I'm struggling to think of a question that encompasses all of that."

Will hums, his eyes heavy-lidded. "You're a clever man, Doctor Lecter," he purrs. "I'm sure you'll think of something."

Hannibal's phone rings before he can reply. He stands with an apologetic smile and goes to his suit jacket, which is in the kitchen, to retrieve it. It's Bedelia. "Good evening, my love," he says.

"Hannibal," she replies, her voice soft and fond. "How has your night been?"

"Without incident," Hannibal says. "Are you on your way over?"

"I can't tonight," she says. "That's why I called you. My Board of Directors invited me to a dinner, and I thought it would be rude to refuse."

"Of course," Hannibal replies smoothly. It would have been very rude of her to refuse. Also rude of them to offer last-minute, but he feels no offense on her behalf. "I shall send Will home, then."

She pauses. "…Will is with you," she says. It's not a question.

"Yes," Hannibal says. "I met with Jack Crawford today, and Will was there. I invited him to dinner, assuming you would join us afterwards for the contracted play session. But, you will not be coming, and so I will send him home."

There is a long silence from her at the other end of the line. "See if he is amenable to us visiting him first thing tomorrow," she says. "I don't want to fall behind."

"I will. Have a good night, my love," he says.

"Goodnight," she replies, and ends the call. Hannibal wonders if Anthony will be joining her at this dinner. He ignores the feeling of disappointment, knowing that he will not be able to touch Will tonight.

Then again, this conversation has been so invigorating, so surprisingly intimate, that it's a wonder neither of them have mentioned that Bedelia should be there to chaperone. It feels like they are in Regency Europe, and even Will's presence unescorted in his home would cause whispers of a scandal.

What would the neighbors think, Doctor Lecter?

He returns to the dining room, phone in hand. "Bedelia is, unfortunately, indisposed," he says, sitting down. "We will not be playing tonight."

Will nods, accepting that without protest. "She wanted me to ask you if you would accept us in your home tomorrow morning, to make up for the delay."

Will smiles. "Sure," he replies. "If you don't mind dogs."

"As long as you don't require them for an audience, I think we will be able to proceed as normal," Hannibal replies. Will huffs a laugh. "This does bring me back to the original point I wanted to speak to you about; the reason I invited you here in the first place. I want to know how to play with you."

Will raises his eyebrows, and meets Hannibal's gaze. "What do you mean?"

"As you said, I know where the erogenous zones are. I understand the practical ways to touch you, placate you, and mount you when the time comes." Will swallows, his cheeks turning pink. He plays with the stem of his wine glass absently and puts his eyes on the dark liquid within the glass. "But I would like to know how to please you."

"How to please me," Will parrots, his voice low. "As in, what I like. What turns me on."

Hannibal smiles. "Yes."

"Why?"

"I suppose you'd call it semantics," Hannibal says. "But the more compatible we are, the quicker you are more likely to go into heat."

Will sucks in a breath. He appears to be considering his next words very carefully. "That runs the risk of becoming very intimate, Doctor Lecter," he says, almost like a warning. Then, his lips twitch in a smile. "I have no doubt about your abilities as a lover, if that's what's concerning you."

"Not at all," Hannibal replies. "Nor do I doubt you."

"Maybe I want to make a game of it," Will says, his smile widening. He meets Hannibal's gaze again, pulling his eyes away from his wine glass. "If I give away all my secrets, what is left for you to observe?"

Hannibal smiles. "You make a fair point," he says. "But I would still like to know."

"Well, I do owe you the answer to a question," Will says. "You want to cash that in?"

Hannibal considers him, and his smile widens. He shakes his head. "No," he replies, and finishes his wine. Will swallows so that he doesn't purr. "You are a very devious creature. I wonder if some sadistic streak runs in you as well."

"I believe you said that that's a matter of opinion."

Hannibal laughs. Oh, what a marvelous thing he has stumbled across. When this is done and Will is pregnant, he owes Margot and Alana a feast. "I shall save my question for now, I think," he says. Will nods, his smile faded but no less pleased. "If you would like to stay, we can go to the study. I have a fine port I've been meaning to try."

"Thank you, but I should get home," Will says. "I wouldn't want to run the risk of getting too familiar."

Hannibal hums, and stands. Will follows suit and Hannibal walks him to the door. "There is one more thing I'd like to ask of you," Hannibal says, and Will dons his coat. Will turns to regard him. "When we are playing, and when you are in heat, do not call me 'Alpha'."

Will smiles. "Too impersonal?" he teases.

Hannibal doesn't respond; he is curious as to if Will is going to agree.

After a moment, Will nods, pressing his lips together. He slides his hands into the pockets of his jacket and pulls the halves tight around him. "Okay," he says. "I won't. Well, I'll try not to. I'll admit I'm not very good at play talk, and I can't promise I won't say it. But I'll try."

"That's all I ask," Hannibal replies. His fingers curl. He wants to put a hand in Will's hair, wants to feel the softness of Will's beard under his palm. He wants to take Will by the neck and kiss him and play with him, lack of chaperone be damned.

Will swallows, and takes a step back, his head ducking down. "Goodnight, Doctor Lecter," he says, and Hannibal nods. Will opens the door and leaves, and Hannibal watches until he gets into his car and drives away.

He retrieves his phone and texts Bedelia to let her know that Will agreed to meet with them tomorrow morning, and that he has gone home. She doesn't respond. Perhaps she is already at the dinner. Or, probably more likely, the dinner was a ruse and she is actually out with Anthony, in the company of an Omega that pleases her much more than Will does.

He swallows and clears the dining room, washing the dishes and storing the leftovers. He should bring up the subject of Anthony, sooner rather than later. It is only natural, Hannibal thinks, that he demand his wife's fidelity if she is going to demand his. His dinner with Will had been very satisfying, even though he has more questions than ever. It had been intimate. It had been wonderful. He thinks of all the others he has courted, and his life with Bedelia, and wonders if it wasn't a question of his own unwillingness to nurture and care for an Omega, but simply the fact that he hadn't found an Omega worth nurturing or caring for.

Until Will.

Dangerous thoughts.

He retreats to his sanctuary and tries to calm his thoughts, tries to find peace in the quiet. None comes, and it feels like there's a cold block of air by his side in the shape of Will, with his sharp eyes and clever smile.

He had promised no emotional attachment would form, but he has overestimated his own self-control. He must reclaim it, or risk making this situation completely chaotic.

Still, his chest feels warm when, an hour later, he gets a text from Bedelia letting him know that Will informed her that he made it home safe, and confirmed their appointment for nine in the morning tomorrow.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

> Effing finally, am I right? Work has gotten so busy I barely have time to do it all, and life and yeah.
>
> Mentions of abortion again, male lactation is reference super briefly. Again please ignore the note at the end of the chapter 'cause I can't figure out how to get rid of it.

Soft orchestral music fills Hannibal's car as he drives South, out of Baltimore and towards D.C. Once he hits 495, he will be able to head West and up Route 7 to get to Wolf Trap, Virginia, where Will lives. Bedelia is navigating for him, since apparently she and Will conspired to keep Will's address a secret from Hannibal for now. Once he gets there, he's sure he will be able to find the place again – Wolf Trap is not a dense area, after all – and he wonders what meagre joy and victory they might feel at keeping Will's location a secret for the first time meeting him at his home.

Perhaps it is another way in which they are trying to claim some control – it seems this entire arrangement will be a non-stop battle of wills, and Hannibal has a conqueror's namesake, but then again, so does Will. It might be better if Hannibal stopped entertaining the idea of taking Will as a mate – between him, Will, and Bedelia, they would likely destroy anything that they touched.

He ignores the spike of warmth he feels at that thought.

"You'll need to be in the left lane," Bedelia says, and Hannibal nods and merges over at her behest. She hums and looks out of the window, as the outer sprawl of D.C. starts to rise up on the horizon, they pass the thrusting spikes of the Church of the Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the speed limit goes down and the traffic thickens. It's rush hour on a weekday and Hannibal isn't surprised, but he feels a small stab of impatience when he sees the rows of red brake lights in front of him.

He wants to get to Will.

"I dislike Virginia," Bedelia murmurs absently, pressing her lips together as, in the next lane over, a man in an old Toyota revs his engine and almost hits the car in front of him, the car rocking forward on its axles as it slams to a halt.

Hannibal hums, raising his eyebrows. "I don't see much difference," he murmurs. The trees are still thick and green, the highways jammed, and the people can't drive worth a damn.

"It's so…unclean," Bedelia murmurs, looking at the bright lights of a McDonald's and a Marriot hotel clustered together just past an exit. "So American. It has lost much of its European influence."

"So has Baltimore," Hannibal says.

"Less so."

"I have always entertained the idea of going back to Italy, one day," Hannibal continues. "Perhaps a tour of it."

Bedelia smiles, letting out a pleased-sounding hum. "When our child is old enough, perhaps we will go," she says. "I think I would like to send him to a European school. Where he can learn some culture."

"There is culture in Baltimore," Hannibal replies, although he quite likes the idea of his child going to school in Italy, learning the language, bathed in the art and the architecture. He thinks of going to the Opera with his son, and hopes that he will inherit Hannibal's love of the finer things. He imagines teaching his child how to cook, and how to hunt. The first Omega hunter – wouldn't that be a fine thing?

Of course, Bedelia would resist. She would probably force their child to become a pescatarian.

Will wouldn't resist. He wouldn't know any better.

"This play session will need to be short," Bedelia says. "I have a lecture at the college at noon."

Hannibal gives an accepting nod, merging onto Route 7 West. The traffic clears significantly – not a lot of people commute away from D.C. in the mornings. He feels an excited anticipation building in his chest as he starts to see signs for Wolf Trap. Bedelia directs him off of Route 7 and the trees grow thick, the roads winding through the hills.

"How did your meeting with Jack go?" Bedelia asks after a moment.

Hannibal smiles. "Surprisingly quickly," he replies. "Jack seemed more interested in my assessment of Will than my interpretation of the serial killer he's hunting."

"Oh?"

"Will has a quite remarkable ability to assume the point of view and understand the killers he hunts," Hannibal says. "Jack wanted to know if it was a dangerous gift. I told him that I didn't think so – which is true – and that he should make as much use of it as he can."

She hums. "You ought to be careful, my love," she says. "Observation is a dangerous thing."

"I'm aware," Hannibal replies. "Thankfully I don't think Will sees me as anything more than a means to an end. Whatever that end might be."

"What do you mean?"

"I still do not understand why he agreed to this arrangement," Hannibal says. Bedelia's hand moves, gesturing for him to turn right at the next light, and he does so. "He doesn't need the money, and if the goal was to bear young, I don't know why he would consent to an arrangement where he doesn't intend to keep the child."

"Perhaps the deed itself is simply enough for him," Bedelia replies coolly. "Without any of the obligation that follows."

"You're suggesting that Will does this out of…selfishness?"

"In one of my case studies, we examine the case of Mister Thornton. He was an Alpha who had a wife, and took an Omega solely for the purpose of breeding him and giving his children to his wife. She could conceive just fine, but would abort all of her children. It was an abusive arrangement, as the Omega was essentially chained in his basement and the only socialization he received was when Mister Thornton would play with and mount him."

Hannibal raises his eyebrows. "And this is a case of abnormal Omega psychology?" he asks.

"Yes," Bedelia replies with a smile. "In interviews after Mister and Missus Thornton's arrests, the Omega did not want to claim any of his children. He said they belonged to his Alpha and his wife, and that he was simply honored by being a breeding animal for them. Five healthy children became wards of the state because their mother didn't want to claim them."

"That's not so strange," Hannibal replies. "I can't imagine the Omega had much in the way of means to care for them properly."

"I feel like that answer is too practical," Bedelia says. "Omegas are predisposed to emotion and semantics. I cannot imagine any Omega, past or present, that would willingly give up their children."

"Will is willing," Hannibal murmurs. "Although…"

"Yes?"

"He did say something interesting. Last night over dinner, he asked me that if you and I were having marital troubles, that we end this arrangement now. I wonder if he feels the same way – he wants to give his child away and wants to make sure he'll go somewhere…whole."

Bedelia hums. She is silent for a moment, and then gestures for Hannibal to make another turn. "Did you give him any indication that such a threat exists?" she asks, too calmly.

"Not at all," Hannibal says. "I merely said that I strive to create harmony in all of my relationships. That includes this arrangement with him. That includes making sure that you are comfortable and secure during this whole process. I want to be sure that, as I move forward, everyone is in agreement with what is going on." He pauses. "I have sensed some animosity between you and Will. Am I wrong?"

Bedelia is silent for a long while after his question. Hannibal resists the urge to look at her to gauge her facial expression. "Will is…headstrong," she says after a long moment. "But I think that is what you like about him. You are attracted to him, and he is handsome and intelligent enough that I do not mind raising a child with his likeness."

Hannibal smiles. "That doesn't answer my question, my love."

"I'll confess I had hoped you would pick an Omega that was more malleable," Bedelia admits airily. "Someone who would not cause trouble. For either of us."

"Do you feel as though Will is causing us trouble?"

"I think he has the potential to," Bedelia replies. "But that is no longer my decision to make. We are contracted now, and only you have the power to break that contract."

Hannibal's smile widens. "I imagine that makes you uncomfortable," he says.

"I trust you," Bedelia replies, but it sounds like a challenge; a sharp reminder for Hannibal to adhere to the obligations and concessions set forth to him within the contract, and in their own verbal agreements. "We're here," she says, and points to a driveway that leads through an open field, to a single house. There is a barn behind it, weathered and covered in snow. Hannibal turns down the drive and pulls up behind Will's car and turns off the engine.

He feels another clench of anticipation when he sees movement in the windows, and hears Will's dogs barking. As he and Bedelia get out of the car, Will's front door opens and no less than seven dogs come barreling out, running immediately towards Hannibal and Bedelia.

"Hey!" Will lets out a sharp whistle through his teeth and the dogs stop, tails wagging wildly as they turn to look at him. "You know better."

One of them barks at him, tail still wagging, and Will tilts his head to one side and gestures for the dogs to go the other way. They do so, heading out into the main body of the field and away from Hannibal and Bedelia as they approach the house.

Only one dog remains – a brindle-colored mutt that is sitting calmly at Will's side. Hannibal greets Will with a warm smile that Will returns, faint and tired-looking. He's dressed in lounge pants and a t-shirt, a thick, soft-looking robe draped loosely around his shoulders. He looks vulnerable and sweet and Hannibal resists the urge to scent him. "Come on in," Will murmurs, and steps back to allow them inside.

"Are those all your animals?" Bedelia asks, bemused like a child has just shown her a rather crude piece of macaroni artwork.

Will nods. "I pick up strays," he says, closing the door behind them. Will's house is pleasantly warm, brightly-lit with natural sunlight, and plainly but comfortably decorated. Despite the amount of animals he owns, the house is in relative order, with only a giant collection of dog beds by the fireplace to mark their presence. "Can I offer you anything? I have coffee, and I think Alana left some tea here the last time she visited."

"Unfortunately we can't stay long," Bedelia replies, unbuttoning her coat. "We should just get started."

Will looks at her for a short while, then his eyes flash to Hannibal. His fingers curl and he presses his lips together, and gives a single, short nod. "Alright," he says, and then he turns and leads them towards the back of the house, up the stairs to a small landing. There are two doors on the left, one on the right, and Will opens the door on the right to reveal a sparse bedroom. There is a mattress in the corner, on the floor, the walls are white, the carpet cream. The windows are covered in dark curtains to block out sunlight.

In any other house, Hannibal would look at the arrangement and think it was destined to be an Omega's nest. But there are no extra blankets or sheets, no piles of warm clothes and soft things for an Omega to curl up in. There's no decoration and the air feels significantly cooler without anything in the room to take up space.

It feels uncomfortable and clinical, and Hannibal's neck itches as he, Will, and Bedelia step inside.

"Let me get you a chair," Will says, his eyes lowered as he leaves the room again. After a moment he returns with one of the chairs from the table by his front window, and he sets it in the opposite corner of the room from the mattress. Bedelia gives him a tight, cordial smile, and sits down.

Hannibal smiles at her, and then turns to look at Will. Will regards him like he's expecting Hannibal to lunge at him, and he sucks in a quiet, quick breath when Hannibal strides towards him and puts a hand on Will's chest, gently pushing him back against the wall by his mattress.

Will's lips part, his chin tilted up in preparation to be kissed, and Hannibal smiles, leaning in but stopping at the last second. He slides his hand up Will's chest, over his collarbone, curling around his throat with a gentle palm but sharp nails. Will shivers, his hands rising naturally to fist in Hannibal's coat.

Hannibal's eyes drop to his mouth, admiring the tender, red inside of his lips, the shine of his bared teeth, the chapped lower lip just begging for him to bite. He *wants* to bite Will, wants to sink his teeth into Will's lip and his throat and the sweet, pale insides of his thighs. He wants to bruise and claw at Will, grind his control and his willpower down to dust in his hands so that he can remake it, gather the dust like sand wet with Will's slick and build him a castle out of what remains.

He raises his eyes to meet Will's, pleased to see gold burning around the edges of his pupil. Then, he slowly pushes his hand farther up, forcing Will's head back against the wall, and his other hand flattens out over the sharp edge of Will's ribs as he cradles Will's jaw, catches his fingers on his cheekbone, and then flattens his hand over Will's eyes.

Will trembles, a quiet whine escaping him from somewhere deep in his chest. Will's scent burns Hannibal's nose and Hannibal tugs his head to one side, opens his mouth wide to kiss at the warm patch of pink skin where Will's pulse is. His heat leaps into Hannibal's mouth, like Will's very heart wants to be the thing that sates Hannibal's hunger.

Without his sight, Will is forced to rely on his sense of smell and touch to be aware of Hannibal and feel Hannibal's influence on him. Hannibal feels Will swallow against his lips and lets out a low snarl he knows only Will can hear. A shiver runs through him and Hannibal is pleased to see goose bumps break out where his neck is bared.

He presses closer and lifts his mouth to Will's ear. "Turn around, darling," he murmurs, and Will whines, biting his lower lip. But he nods, tilting his head into the press of Hannibal's hand and turning around. Hannibal barely gives him the room to do it, and forces his body close to Will's, his other hand finding Will's ribs again and tightening as he pulls Will's head back onto his shoulder through the touch over his eyes.

Hannibal growls again, just to feel Will tremble, and he nips at Will's ear, his teeth sheathed by his lips. Will twitches and Hannibal nuzzles his soft, dark hair, his free hand tugging on Will's robe so that it slides off his shoulders and falls to the floor over their feet.

Hannibal has seen Will in so many layers so often, to have only one separating Hannibal's touch from Will's skin is almost obscene. Hannibal can't resist – he flattens a hand over Will's stomach and wraps his knuckles in Will's shirt, tugging it up, so that when he lets go of Will's head and touches his hip, his fingers find smooth, bare skin.

Will gasps, blinking as though dazed, and leans forward so his hands are against the wall, he arches his shoulders up into Hannibal's mouth and pushes his hips back against Hannibal's like he's begging to be mounted. Hannibal wants to mount him – which is pointless, since Will is certainly not fertile yet, but that doesn't stop the rolling desire in Hannibal's gut from tightening and hardening like a steel weight in him, magnetized to Will's spine.

Will is warm and sweet in his arms, his chest heaving when Hannibal slides his hand up Will's bared stomach, coming to a stop over his pounding heart. His fingers curl against the wall and Hannibal smiles, pressing another wet kiss to Will's nape. He drops one of his hands to Will's cock and Will's breath hitches, a stuttering moan falling from his parted lips when Hannibal touches him through his clothes.

Will makes a rough, desperate growl. Hannibal hums. "What was that?" he asks.

Will turns his head, shows Hannibal his teeth. His eyes are half-lidded and burning, molten and gold. "Please," he hisses, like the word is being forced out of him.

Hannibal smiles, and pulls back. Will growls, turning around sharply and Hannibal catches him, putting a hand to his throat and forcing him back against the wall.

His smile widens when Will's eyes flash, angry and desperate all at once. "You know better," he murmurs, and Will's upper lip twitches, caught between a smirk and a growl. Hannibal lets him go and shrugs off his coat. "Get on your hands and knees on the bed."

He turns around before he watches Will obey and hands his coat to Bedelia. She takes it, folding it across her lap. Her lips are tight and her expression is purposely unreadable. She looks at him for a long moment and Hannibal wonders what she sees. Then, she takes a deep breath, and nods for him to keep going.

Hannibal smiles, and turns back around.

He stops.

He's seen sketches of the optimal mounting position, knows from art and physical diagrams what it looks like – not that it's something difficult to imagine. An Omega will assume that position during their heat, their chests low to the ground and their head bowed, asses up to both encourage an Alpha to mount them and to ensure that, when they do, the Alpha's seed will spill as deep inside of them as possible.

Hannibal knows he would have seen it eventually, but somehow the idea of seeing *Will* do it is one that hadn't yet occurred to him.

Will is picture-perfect, the bow of his back rivalling any art that Hannibal has ever seen. His shirt clings to his shoulders, showing the muscle there, the strength of him. His lounge pants encase his thick thighs, and there's the smallest sliver of skin showing on his lower back.

Hannibal's fingers curl. He approaches the mattress and sinks to his knees between Will's feet, forcing them farther apart. Will lets out a sweet, plaintive whine, pressing back against Hannibal's weight as Hannibal covers him.

Hannibal puts a hand in his hair and fists it tight, forcing Will's head forward to expose his nape. His other hand is greedy, shoving Will's shirt up to bare more of his back. There's a scar just shy of his kidney that looks like an old wound from a knife. Hannibal wants to ask about it, but he swallows his questions back and bows over Will, his chest to Will's back. Will shivers, tense under his weight, bearing it like the finest of his breed.

He is a wonderful example of Omega submission. Hannibal wants to soak in this feeling for the rest of his life.

He wraps his arm around Will's chest, digs his nails into Will's stomach and drags them down. Will growls, trembling finely under his weight, his chest low to the mattress and his fingers tightening in the single sheet spread across it.

Hannibal puts the hand in his hair over his eyes again and Will whimpers.

"*Please*," he gasps, arching into Hannibal's weight. Without Hannibal's kiss, his slick response is slower to trigger, but Hannibal can smell his heat, the sweet mint and lemongrass scent of him. He presses his nose to Will's nape and breathes in deeply. "Alpha – Doctor Lecter. *Please*."

"Shh, darling," Hannibal growls, finding again that he hopes they are speaking low enough that Bedelia can't hear them. These moments feel precious and private, and he feels strangely loathe to share them with their audience. He wonders if there will ever come a point where Bedelia doesn't insist on being here – if she will be present in Will's heat bed as well, and watch as Hannibal mounts and breeds him properly.

He wants to do it now. He wants to mount Will, even though it would be for no purpose other than their own pleasure. He is reminded of the more conservative pastors, preaching against

sex when it's not for the purposes of procreation. He imagines the kinds of things he would do to Will would make them clutch at their crosses and cry out in horror.

"That's it," he hisses, as he cups Will's hip through his clothes and pulls Will back against him, grinds his erection against Will's heat. Unbidden, a purr rumbles in his chest and Will gasps, a soft moan falling from his sweet mouth as he arches against Hannibal's weight as though he intends to throw him off. It's an instinctive move, forcing an Alpha to be rougher with him, to prove that the Alpha is capable of holding him down and mounting him.

He imagines chasing Will through his open field, into the trees, catching him and throwing him to the ground in the wild, open air. He bares his teeth and lays them against Will's neck and Will makes another sound, louder, more desperate. Hannibal can smell his arousal, the thick musk of his slick as he starts to get wet for Hannibal. It's a decadent scent.

But it's not enough. Hannibal is feeling greedy.

He pulls back and roughly rolls Will over, covering him before Will can get his bearings. He fists his hand back in Will's hair and yanks him upright, Will's arms go back to support his weight and Hannibal pulls him into a kiss.

It's rough, demanding, and Will answers him in kind. He bares his teeth against Hannibal's mouth and spreads his legs, wrapping them loosely around Hannibal's thighs. Hannibal can almost hear Will's heart pounding against the back of his ribs, and he puts a hand there, full of the insatiable need to claw it out of Will's chest and hold it for his own. He would consume it as Will bled, smear the blood between their mouths, push it back in while it was still beating and watch it stutter and go still when he knotted Will.

He pulls back, breathing hard, purring at the sight of Will's eyes, half-lidded and gold and black. Will's cheeks are flushed with arousal, the rest spreading down his neck and his exposed chest where the shirt won't fall. Hannibal pushes him back down and covers him, puts his hands behind Will's knees and forces him to curl up and accept Hannibal's weight and dominion over him as he grinds his clothed erection between Will's legs.

He can smell Will's slick now, thick and heady, and he leans down for another kiss that Will eagerly answers, one hand smoothing through Hannibal's hair, cradling his skull like Hannibal is nursing at Will's body. He wonders if Will would do the same if Hannibal got his teeth in Will's neck, or sucked at his breast when Will started to produce milk.

Will gasps again, shivering and fine. Despite the cool air he's starting to sweat and Hannibal licks it from the hollow at the base of his throat, growling at the taste. Everything about Will smells and tastes so *good*, Hannibal has no idea if it's the Omega strain in him, or something that is uniquely wild and dark that only Will possesses. He cannot remember another Omega smelling this good before that he has met.

Will lets out another soft, shivery growl, his free hand raking down Hannibal's clothed back. "Touch me," he demands, insistent and desperate, and Hannibal wants to oblige him. He lets go of one of Will's legs and flattens his palm over Will's cock through his clothes and Will bares his teeth, his eyes fluttering shut as Hannibal touches him.

Hannibal snarls and Will's eyes snap open. "Look at me," he growls, and Will swallows harsh enough that Hannibal hears his throat click. Hannibal smiles at him, lets go of Will's other leg and wraps his fingers in Will's damp hair. He rests their foreheads together and tightens his hand. He wants to take Will's cock out, touch him skin to skin, and he would if he didn't think Bedelia would protest. "Good boy. Keep your eyes on me."

Will bites his lower lip, nodding. His eyelids flutter when Hannibal moves his hand, but he keeps them open, obedient and sweet. Hannibal can't resist kissing him again, tasting the coffee on Will's tongue, licking behind his teeth. Will trembles when he does it, breath hitching when he feels Hannibal's teeth in his lip.

Will lifts his head up and puts his mouth to Hannibal's ear. "I'll give you a legacy," he whispers, too quiet for Bedelia to hear – another secret cry only an Omega can make. Hannibal shudders, closing his eyes, and puts his nose to Will's neck. "I know it's not allowed, but I'd let you."

Hannibal shivers. "What would you let me do?" he rumbles.

"Whatever you wanted," Will replies, and Hannibal has the fleeting thought that Bedelia was right – Will's observation is a powerful, dangerous gift. A double-edged sword. "I'd let you bite me, and mount me right now, if you wanted to."

"Careful, Will," Hannibal whispers, and nuzzles under Will's ear, tastes the sweat and the need on his skin. "Don't overplay your hand."

"This isn't poker," Will replies, and arches with a hiss when Hannibal tightens his hand on Will's cock. Hannibal tells himself it's a punishment, a warning – grabbing too harshly and tugging on Will's hair too tightly – but he knows it's not. It's incentive. There's a difference between being rude and being inflammatory and Will is both.

Hannibal hums, smiling against Will's skin. "Does that thought please you?" he asks. "The thought that you might provoke me so much that I lost control?" Will whines quietly, flattening his hands across Hannibal's shoulders. "That I might bite you, and gain my Voice, and order you to your knees to breed you whenever the urge struck me?"

"*God*," Will growls, and his cock twitches in Hannibal's hand, and the sudden flood of his slick-scent is almost overwhelming. Hannibal can feel how wet he is, even through their clothes. It might leave a stain on Hannibal's suit pants.

"Perhaps I should make you wear that mask," Hannibal growls, turning his hand to cup Will's balls through his pants, tease at where he's hot and wet between his legs. "Curb your wild tongue."

Will huffs a strained laugh and Hannibal pulls back, resting their foreheads together when he sees Will's smile. "If my tongue offends you, cut it out and throw it away," he murmurs. He slides his hands up Hannibal's neck and wraps them through his hair. "If my hands offend you, cut them off and throw them away."

"I fear there might be nothing left, if I did that," Hannibal growls.

Will tightens his legs around Hannibal's waist and rears up for another kiss. It's short, sharp like the aftertaste of lemons, and compliments his scent so wonderfully. Hannibal moans into it, pressing Will down with his weight and tightening his hand on Will's cock. Will whimpers, biting Hannibal's lower lip, then his own when Hannibal breaks the kiss.

"Take all the pieces of me you want," he says, quiet and sacred as a wedding vow. "Take them and consume them. I know that's what you want above all else."

"You think I want to take them, or do you simply want to give them to me?" Hannibal asks.

Will sucks in a breath when Hannibal kisses him again, before he can answer. Will whimpers against his mouth, his gut sinking in and chest tightening as Hannibal twists his hand, tightens his grip. He knows Will is close, can feel the stutter of his heartbeat and the way his hands shake against Hannibal.

"Show me," Hannibal demands. His voice feels curiously weak and he wants to growl at Will, wants to use his Voice even though he doesn't have one. His throat feels thready and thin, too weak at the neck. Will's teeth could tear him apart if he wanted. "Show me how much you want to breed for me, Will. Show me what you have to offer."

I dare you.

Will's breath hitches. He can't keep his eyes open although Hannibal knows he tries. His fingers clench and his back arches and he buries his face in Hannibal's neck as his orgasm rushes through him. He's soaked to the core, sweat and slick and his release staining him.

Hannibal can't resist – he dips his fingers below the waistband of Will's lounge pants, smiling when Will lets out a soft sound of protest at his comparatively cold touch. Hannibal slicks his fingers with Will's seed and pulls his hand away, admiring the shine of it in the light.

Will gasps, his lips parting, and Hannibal slides his fingers between Will's jaws, forcing him to clean them. Will's tongue curls around his fingers, his pink cheeks hollowing as he sucks. He looks whorish, decadent, the finest Omega that Hannibal has ever seen.

Hannibal pulls back and cups Will's nape. He pulls Will upright and kisses his forehead, corrects his clothes, and then stands, helping Will to his feet.

Will licks his lips, looking hungry. "Your turn."

Hannibal smiles. "Unfortunately, I believe time is against us," he says, and looks to Bedelia to confirm. She blinks, like she was coming out of a trance, and checks her watch. She gives a hum that sounds almost disappointed and Hannibal cocks his head to one side. He parts his jaws and scents the air, curious to smell the familiar scent of her own arousal mixing with Will's.

"Yes," she says, standing and handing Hannibal his coat. Will swallows, flushing as he steps back. Hannibal and Bedelia look very put together in comparison to his flushed, sweaty state. Will's eyes are still gold, sharp but unfocused at the same time, like they had been when he'd

profiled the sauna crime scene. "I have a lecture to give, and we must leave now if we're to make it on time."

Will nods. If he has any protest, he swallows it back. "I'll walk you out," he says, and leads the way down the stairs and to the front door. His scent is thick in Hannibal's nose, sitting heavy on his tongue. Hannibal resists the urge to kiss and touch Will again, knowing that the play session is over and he has to maintain his decorum once again.

He adjusts his cock in his suit pants and tries to think of something to will it away, but with Will's scent in his lungs he is finding it difficult. He thinks of the bed in his guest bedroom, saddened at the fact that Will wasn't there to smell where Hannibal spread his seed. He will do it again, he decides. He will soak that mattress so deeply that Will can smell it from his car.

"Thank you for accommodating us, Will," Bedelia says with a warm smile, fastening her coat. Will smiles back at her, wrapping his arms across his chest and giving her a nod. "We will see you again tonight?"

"Unless duty calls," Will replies with a one-shouldered shrug. "I have a late class tonight, but I can drive by after. Around nine."

"Wonderful," Bedelia says.

"I have invited Alana, Margot, and Morgan to dinner Saturday night," Hannibal tells him. "If you are able, I would love to have you join us. We can play before or after."

Will bites his lower lip, looking somewhat hesitant. "Did…Alana say she was definitely bringing Morgan?" he asks.

Hannibal cocks his head to one side, trying to deduce the exact nature of Will's sudden reticence. "She said she would think about it," he replies. "I haven't confirmed one way or the other."

Will nods. He opens the door to allow them out. The brindle mutt is still sitting on the porch and lifts its head, woofing softly in greeting, tail wagging once. "I'll see you both tonight," he says. He's shivering in the cold and Hannibal decides not to linger, lest he catch a chill.

He nods at Will and gives him another smile, then puts a hand on Bedelia's back and leads her to the car. He hears Will whistle and turns to see the dogs coming back into the house. Will shuts the door without another look their way.

"I appreciate you being so aware of the time," Bedelia murmurs, as they get into the car and Hannibal pulls around and back onto the road.

"As I said before, I am only willing to continue with this arrangement as long as you are comfortable, and as long as it does not prove troublesome to any party involved," Hannibal replies. His chest is still burning and his head feels warm, but he isn't so much affected by the fact that he did not achieve his own orgasm, but more aggravated that he didn't do to Will as

much as he wanted. He didn't get to touch Will's bare thighs, taste his slick, or mount him, and he wanted to. He still wants to. Desperately.

He thinks about the play talk – Will had seemed to adore the idea of Hannibal gaining a Voice, of the fact that if they were mated, Hannibal would be able to get him slick at a moment's notice, fill him with child after child at his leisure. Perhaps it was just instinctive reactions to play talk, but Hannibal gets the impression that, even in the height of his heat, Will is aware of everything he says and does, aware of every touch and kiss and how it affects Hannibal in turn.

Observation is a dangerous gift.

Bedelia hums, and settles a hand over Hannibal's on the gear shift. Her hand is dainty and pale, so unlike Will's strong hands. Hannibal thinks about Will's knuckles and how they would look, bloody and bruised.

He thinks about the scar on Will's back, and how many questions he might have to win from Will before all of his curiosities are satisfied.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

> sorry it's a short chapter guys but I FINALLY FIGURED OUT HOW TO GET RID OF THE NOTE! THANK YOU @MAYDEI.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Alana calls Hannibal just past lunchtime. Hannibal has just walked his last patient out and he answers the phone on the fourth ring. "Hello Alana," he greets warmly, taking a seat at his desk as he prepares to write out his notes after the session. Hannibal takes sparse notes during sessions, feeling that it is distracting to a patient when he writes after they say something, and prefers to write out all of his observations after the fact, in the quiet of his own thoughts.

"Hi Hannibal," she replies, just as warmly. "I wanted to speak to you about something. Do you have a moment?"

"Always, for you," Hannibal says.

She huffs a small laugh. "I'm in the area. Could I come to your office?"

Hannibal opens his appointment book, seeing that he doesn't have another session scheduled until three. "Yes, my next patient isn't for another two hours," he replies. "When shall I expect you?"

"About fifteen minutes. Thank you," she replies, and then ends the call. Hannibal gives a curious hum, setting his phone down, and writing out his session notes to pass the time. He cannot imagine what Alana might need to speak to him about, in person no less. Perhaps Jack has spoken to her. Or Will. But that is narrow-minded – perhaps she simply wants to talk to him as friends. They are friends, after all, and their rapidly thickening web of mutual connections will not necessarily change that friendship.

But, he is learning, whenever Will is involved, the standard for behavior cannot be relied upon.

She arrives just as she said, fifteen minutes later, windswept and flushed. Hannibal smiles at her when he opens the door and allows her inside. He gestures for her to take a seat in a patient's chair and sits in his own. He folds one leg over the other and rests his laced hands in his lap.

She watches him for a moment, one eyebrow raised. "Are you going to psychoanalyze me?" she asks, teasing.

"I won't if you won't," Hannibal replies with a smile.

"I think we might not have a choice," Alana says. She sighs, puts both feet on the ground and rests her elbows on her knees, rubbing her hands over her face. "Will called me."

"Oh?" Hannibal asks, tilting his head to one side.

Alana nods. "You told him Morgan might be coming to dinner on Saturday," she says. Hannibal nods, and she sighs and shakes her head. "You shouldn't have done that, Hannibal. Or you should have at least spoken to me about it first."

"Why is that?"

Alana sighs again. "I will tell you, but only if you understand there are certain things I can't tell you about. I will tell you things that I know as your friend, but you mustn't ask me about Will, or anything Margot might tell you during your sessions with her." She pauses. "Do you agree?"

"I will restrain myself, yes," Hannibal says.

She smiles, but it's thin and strained. "Will's relationship with Morgan is complicated," she says quietly, looking down at her hands. "He has to…have time to prepare, before he sees his son." Hannibal raises his eyebrows, wondering what she might mean. His fingers curl and he presses his lips together to avoid asking. "I never told you about when Will agreed to donate his eggs to us."

"No," Hannibal replies softly, "you didn't. I didn't think it was any of my business."

"Well, it's becoming your business," Alana replies, somewhat sharply. "You must understand – I had no hesitation in introducing the two of you, and even still I don't think that your relationship or your arrangement with Will is threatening, or ill-founded. He will do what is asked of him, without question or protest."

Hannibal hums.

Alana pauses for another moment, and then she sighs. "Will has no family, Hannibal," she says after another long moment. "Throwing the obvious fact in his face is cruel."

"I don't understand," Hannibal says lightly. "I merely invited my friend and her wife and child to dinner, along with another friend, and my wife. Where was I cruel in this?"

Alana smiles, but it's tight and half-formed. "Biologically, Will is Morgan's mother, Hannibal," she says. "And Mason was his father. I don't think it's unfair to assume Will has some maternal instinct, however small, towards Morgan. And now he's been given the opportunity to bear young – this time his own body, his own offspring – and will be forced to give it away. I'm worried it will conjure strong feelings."

"Did Will know you intended to combine his egg with Mason's sperm to sire Morgan?" Hannibal asks. "Or did he assume you would combine it with one of your own?"

"He knew it was Mason's," Alana replies.

"Did Will ever know Mason personally?" Hannibal asks. He remembers Margot claiming she would never ask Will to sleep with her brother, and while Hannibal understands the sentiment, he wonders if it was ever that first choice. Hannibal remembers meeting Mason, briefly and uncomfortably, and thinks that if anyone could have handled that boy, it would have been Will.

Alana regards Hannibal for a long moment, her eyes tracking over his face like she intends to find some weakness in his mask, some flaw in his armor. Hannibal knows she will find none, and forces his fingers to loosen in his lap.

"He knew Mason as well as he knew Margot," she finally says, slowly, almost Bedelia-like in how she considers each word before letting them out. Hannibal smiles, knowing that that's not an answer. She shifts her weight and sighs, rubbing her hands over her face again. "I don't think I should bring Morgan," she continues.

"Now I feel as though I must insist," Hannibal replies coolly, his smile widening at her sharp, warning look. "Alana, it's your decision, and you know Will better than I ever could. I respect whatever you decide for the sake of his happiness. I simply wanted to extend the offer."

She smiles, relaxing from her defensive posture. "I appreciate the offer," she says, "and if you do want to meet Morgan again, I will certainly have dinner with you and Bedelia, and him and Margot, some other time. But not with Will."

"I understand," Hannibal says. She smiles and stands, and Hannibal stands as well, accepting her loose, friendly hug. He walks her to the door. "I will see you Saturday."

"If not before," she replies. "Thank you, Hannibal."

"Drive safely," Hannibal says, and closes the door behind her. He returns to his desk and gazes down at the notes on his last patient, humming in thought.

Then, he turns to the back of the book and writes, along the top of the page; Will Graham. He writes down a brief physical description of Will, and then begins to write down his notes and observations about Will. His sharp tongue, and all-seeing eyes. The way he moves when he's profiling a killer. The way he spars with Bedelia and Hannibal when they're at the dinner table. And now, his new questions about Morgan, and Mason Verger. He wants to know about it. He believes it will lend him some insight as to Will's motivations and reasoning behind agreeing to this whole arrangement.

He fills almost six pages without stopping, before his alarm tells him it's ten minutes before his next appointment. He sits back and sighs, absently fidgeting with his pen and staring at his scrawling script until the words start to blur together.

He still has a question he is allowed to ask Will, which Will promised to answer honestly. Too many come to mind. Why did Will agree to this? What does he want out of this? Why did he react so strangely to Morgan Verger? How did he know Mason Verger? What did Alana mean by 'time to prepare'?

He sighs, and lifts his head at the knock on his door. He closes the book and stands, smiling at the sight of the round, squirrelly Omega that greets him at his door.

"Hello Franklyn," he greets cordially, and steps back. "Come on in."

Hannibal plans to make crisp lemon chicken livers. Of course, it won't really be chicken, but no one needs to know that aside from himself. As he's cutting up the liver, his phone rings and he answers it.

"This is Doctor Lecter," he says.

There's a second of hesitation, then Will's voice; "Doctor Lecter," he says, quietly like he's trying not to be overheard. "I hope you don't mind me calling; I got your number from Alana."

Hannibal smiles, and wonders how Bedelia would react. "It's no trouble at all, Will," he replies. "How can I help you?"

"My lecture got canceled," Will replies. "And I don't really want to drive back to Wolf Trap and then your place. I was hoping I could come over earlier, and we can wait for Doctor Du Maurier."

Hannibal's smile widens. "Of course," he replies. "I was just making dinner. I'll be sure to make some for you as well, if you're hungry."

"Starving," Will replies. "Great. I'll be there in about half an hour."

Hannibal bids him drive safely, and then he calls Bedelia. "Hello, my love," he says when she answers. "How are you?"

"Wonderful," she replies warmly. Hannibal can hear voices in the background and wonders if she is at another work function. They seem to have so many at the university. "How are you?"

"Doing well," Hannibal replies. "Will called me."

She pauses. "Did he?" she asks.

"Yes, he said he got my number from Alana." Hannibal doesn't wait for her reaction. "He's in Baltimore, and asked if he could come over earlier instead of driving home and back again. I told him he was welcome. If you wanted to come by earlier, we can have an earlier night. Or, he and I will have dinner, and wait for you."

Bedelia hums. She makes that kind of noise when she's in deep thought. "I will be there as soon as I can," she replies coolly. "But of course he may come to dinner. I will be another hour or so, at least."

"I understand," Hannibal says, smiling. Amongst the crowd, he thinks he can hear a familiar voice. "Give Anthony my best. We really should have him over for dinner again, sometime soon. I have missed his company."

"I…will extend your invitation," she says, tightly. "Perhaps we will invite him on Saturday."

"Alana informed me that Morgan won't be joining us," Hannibal replies. "I certainly have a seat for him."

"I'll see you later, Hannibal," she says.

"Have fun, my love," Hannibal replies, and then he hangs up and sets the phone down.

There's a rumble in his chest and Hannibal smiles, letting himself purr freely as he turns his attention back to the food. Having Anthony and Will at the same table? He's practically giddy at the idea – oh, what a wonderful sight that might be! To have Bedelia's suspected lover, and Will in the same room – the Omega that should have been and the Omega that is. Hannibal imagines Will picking Anthony apart, his all-seeing gaze picking up the dilation of his eyes when he looks at Bedelia, the way Bedelia laughs a little louder and smiles a little more when in his company. He imagines if Will might come to the same conclusion as Hannibal has.

Omegas are notoriously territorial with each other, especially when it comes to Alphas. That is one of the reasons why the law does not allow an Alpha to take more than one Omega mate at a time – not only would it be simply impossible to sate two Omegas in heat, but they would likely kill each other if they thought their Alpha's affection was not wholly theirs.

He is elated at this turn of events. If Bedelia thinks she might cow Will, or show him his place by bringing Anthony to their dinner table, it promises to be the exact wrong kind of power play. He debates warning her, but decides against it.

Perhaps Will was right – he is a sadistic man.

Will arrives close to seven at night, as lovely as Hannibal remembers. He's dressed in slacks and a collared shirt with a thick, dark blue sweater over that. Hannibal takes his coat and hangs it up and directs him to the kitchen.

"Can I offer you some wine?" he asks.

Will nods, accepting the glass Hannibal gives him with a grateful hum. He watches Hannibal in silence for a moment as Hannibal finishes with the livers and turns his attention to the side dishes – he will serve it with a crisp salad and wild rice with cinnamon.

He starts to boil a pot of water and, in the brief interlude, pours himself a glass and regards Will. They stare at each other for a long time, unblinking. Will cannot hold eye contact for too long, but his eyes don't move far when they do.

Finally, Hannibal smiles. "I've been informed there is a change to the guest list for Saturday," he says. Will hums, like he wasn't the one responsible for it. "Bedelia will be bringing a friend of hers, in Morgan's absence. He's an Omega, a close colleague of ours."

Will raises his eyebrows and nods into his next drink of wine. "I wasn't aware you indulged in relationships with Omegas," he says, and Hannibal feels the same elation spring up in his chest. He swallows back his purr.

"What gave you that impression?"

"We are a hysterical breed," Will replies coolly. "I didn't think you had the tolerance for it. He must be very special."

"I'll admit, he is more Bedelia's friend than he is mine, but Anthony is a very refined example of his species. He's quite remarkable, really."

Will huffs. "Tell me, then," he says, setting his wine glass down and meeting Hannibal's eyes, "why did you not choose to mount him instead?"

Hannibal smiles. "I don't believe I owe you the answers to any questions," he replies smoothly. Will's eyes flash and he smirks, picking up his glass again. "I have one for you, though, that I would like to ask." Will hums.

"Alright," he replies. "But you only get one. Choose wisely, Doctor Lecter."

"Alana visited me today and told me that she thought it cruel of me to invite your son to our dinner, that you didn't have time to prepare for such a thing." Will doesn't respond, his eyes on his wine, face unreadable. Hannibal hums and folds his arms across his chest. "The question I would like to ask is this: How do you feel, when it comes to Morgan Verger?"

Will frowns, blinking at Hannibal. "That's…not the question I was expecting," he admits.

Hannibal smiles. The hears the water start to boil and turns around, gifting Will time to think about his answer without Hannibal's gaze pinning him down. He takes two cups of rice and pours it into the water, bringing the heat down to a simmer for the rice to thicken. He grinds salt into the water and starts to stir it.

"…I love him," Will says after a moment. Hannibal hums, but doesn't turn around. "I love him so much, it feels like pain whenever I think about him." He falls silent again, and Hannibal turns around to regard him – Will must know that that answer isn't satisfactory.

Will draws in a sharp breath through his teeth and lowers his eyes. His hands are flat on the counter. He's not wearing his wedding ring today. "I don't want to take him from Alana and Margot," he whispers. "But it feels like I can pretend. I can pretend that he's mine, that he's mine and Alana's, if I wanted to." He sighs. "He looks a lot like her."

"He looks like you," Hannibal replies. "Spitting image, really."

Will huffs, and shakes his head. He's smiling faintly. "You are a cruel man," he breathes. "You want to hurt me. I can see it in your eyes when we play."

"I don't take any pleasure in your suffering, Will," Hannibal replies. He takes the livers and puts them in a baking tray, and sets them in the oven to stay warm while they wait for the rice. He finally turns around, taking a sip of wine as he regards Will's bowed head, his white knuckles. "I will admit that I find you very interesting. I would take it as a personal triumph if you were to be open and honest with me."

Will raises his eyes, and presses his lips together.

"You said that there are parts of you that you would not force Alana to bear, and that is one of the reasons you never pursued a relationship with her." Will bites his lower lip and nods. "We all have our darkness, Will. We all have our burdens. Sometimes it's beneficial to share that load."

"I -." Will shakes his head, lowers his eyes. "No. Not with her."

"With who, then?" Hannibal asks. "With Margot? With your dogs? With me?"

Will goes tense at the shoulders. He sucks in a breath and lets out a low whine that feels like a plea for mercy. "You want so desperately to know me," he breathes, fingers curling. "Why? What possible reason could you have for wanting to get to know me, when I'm nothing but a breeder for you?"

"I never said I would ration my answers to you, Will," Hannibal replies. "Ask me anything. I will answer you."

"You will *dance*," Will hisses. His eyes are bright, ringed with gold. Something is making him angry, reacting like an Omega would, and Hannibal is intrigued. He hasn't touched Will, and under the scents of the cooking meat and rice, Hannibal knows that the scents he left behind in the guest room haven't traveled down here. "You will respond with pretty words and diversions and I will never be satisfied."

"Do you want to be?" Hannibal whispers.

Will opens his mouth to respond, before he clamps his jaws tightly shut and lets out a soft, frustrated growl. He lowers his eyes and takes another sip of whine. His hands are shaking. "Will," Hannibal murmurs, stepping closer and setting his wine glass down so that he can lean on the kitchen counter with both hands. Will straightens up, trying to put distance between Hannibal's mouth and his neck. "I know it doesn't seem like it, but you have the power here. You hold all the cards, it is by your consent that this is happening in the first place. No one here is attacking you. No one here wants to see you hurt."

"No one here," Will replies tensely. "But we are the only ones here, Doctor Lecter."

Hannibal smiles. "You're right," he says, just as quietly. Will regards him for a long, long moment, and Hannibal sighs. "I don't understand you," he adds fondly, shaking his head. "You offer me all of your physical vulnerability, you grant me access to your neck and your body with no reservation."

"That's all you need from me," Will replies. "That's all you want."

"You think you know me so well, to know what I want?"

"*Yes*," Will says. He pushes himself to his feet and mimics Hannibal's posture, leaning on the counter, both of them angled towards each other like generals over a map of battle. "You would see me skinned," he hisses, "destroyed and on display like some piece of art in a museum for you to show off as your own creation to anyone who wanted to look. And I tell you I won't have it. I *won't*."

Hannibal tilts his head to one side. The way Will says these things, it's like he's had to say it before. Hannibal is intrigued, and overjoyed that Will has become comfortable enough to challenge him, to fight with him in more than just underhanded comments and sly observations. This is Will when he's fighting, defending his home and his heart and his young. This is what he would be with Hannibal's child in his belly and Hannibal's bite on his neck.

"If you don't want to be destroyed," Hannibal says, measured and calm, "then you must first change your own way of thinking, Will. I see no threat to you other than the one you pose to yourself."

Will growls, his breath leaving him in a heavy, offended gasp. "I am not so easily won, Doctor Lecter," he says.

"Yes," Hannibal replies, smiling. "I'm starting to understand that."

"You and your wife delight in your power," Will continues, fully entrenched in his anger, his words sharp and cutting; "Your superiority and your strength. You know that you have the physical advantage, and she has the social advantage. I have *no* power, not the kind that matters."

"Then why do this at all?" Hannibal asks. "Why submit to the control you think we so willfully wield over you, when you do not enjoy it? When you are so unable to defend yourself?"

Will swallows harshly. He straightens up, ceding the defeat, or trying to retreat. Hannibal can't be certain. "I would have you answer," he says.

"No," Will replies. He takes his wine glass and finishes it.

"You like it," Hannibal says. "You like forcing me to remain in control, to remain cordial and accommodating, when I would be the one to suffer the consequences if that control were to ever break." Will swallows again. "I could chase you right now, and mount you, and swear you to secrecy if I got my teeth in your flesh and gained my Voice. Bedelia would never know. It is only through the character you claim I have that I resist."

Will raises his eyes and clenches his jaw. He's trembling, his eyes glowing golden. Hannibal can smell just a *hint* of the sweetness of Will's scent, the thickness of his arousal. Hannibal's lips twitch as he fights back his smile, realizing that Will is definitely enjoying this more than he's letting on. He is a mongoose under the house, waiting for the cobra to stop his dance.

"I would stop you," he whispers.

Hannibal does smile, this time. "Could you?" he asks. He has no intention of making good on his threat, of course, but Will doesn't need to know that. And Hannibal ignores the small part of himself that growls at the lie.

"Yes," Will adds. He rubs a hand over his neck and swallows. "You would see me chained up and bound to you, if she allowed it."

"Never," Hannibal breathes. "I would chase you freely, openly. I would never hide you away."

Will's eyes flash.

Hannibal blinks, understanding snapping into place in front of his eyes. "That's it, isn't it?" he asks, straightening up. "That is what you fear."

"Stop," Will says.

"You create legacies, knowing that as long as some small part of you exists in the world, your name and your bloodline will never die."

"*Stop*," Will says again, harsher this time. He takes a step back and Hannibal lets out a soft growl, daring him to run any farther. Will freezes, his eyes wide, his breathing heavy. Still, despite that, the sweet scent of him is growing stronger.

"You can't escape this forever, Will," Hannibal says. Will lifts his eyes, looks at him wide-eyed and nervous, and swallows harshly. "I can give you that legacy, my dear. If that is what you want."

"It isn't," Will growls. He shakes his head and covers his ears in a childish form of resistance. Hannibal circles the counter and Will trembles when Hannibal takes his hands in both of his, holding them to his chest.

"What do you want, Will?" Hannibal asks. He tucks his fingers under Will's chin and forces their eyes to meet. "Tell me. I'll do whatever is in my power to give it to you."

Will licks his lips, his exhale unsteady. "No," he says, and tries to pull back.

"Will -."

"Doctor Lecter, *let go of me*."

Hannibal blinks, and releases Will's hand and his chin. He takes a step back like he had been physically pushed, his eyes wide when Will gasps and stumbles back, the same force that pushed Hannibal sending him back to the cabinets as well. Will is breathing heavily, unsteady and terrified now. His scent is saccharine with fear.

"I -." He stops, rubs a hand over his face, and shakes his head. "I'm sorry. Shit. I'm so sorry -."

"Will," Hannibal breathes. He puts a hand to his chest and rubs at his sternum. His ribs ache, like someone put a hook around him and forced him back. "Will…do you have a Voice?" he asks. He cannot think of anything else he has heard that would have made him react like that – Will's words had been a command, of course, but Hannibal has refused commands before. This had been a God-given order, irresistible and powerful. An Omega Voice.

Will whines, the sound plaintive and desperate and he shakes his head desperately again. "I – I have to go," he says. He runs a hand through his hair and reaches for his phone. "I have to leave. I'm sorry."

Hannibal takes a deep breath and tries to get his bearings. His lungs feel bruised, his ribs cracked. He's never heard an Omega's Voice before and is taken aback by how deeply it struck him. "Let me walk you out," he says slowly. Will regards him, guarded and scared. "Please."

Will presses his lips together and nods. Hannibal follows him to the door and Will grabs his coat, folding it over his arm and not even bothering to put it on in his haste to leave Hannibal's home. Hannibal opens the door for him and Will hesitates on the threshold, his phone in his other hand.

"Please don't say anything to Alana, or Doctor Du Maurier," he whispers, begging the words. He lifts his eyes to Hannibal's and bites his lower lip. "Please."

"Does Alana know about this?" Hannibal asks. Will shakes his head frantically. "Then I won't tell her," he says, and Will nods, his smile small but grateful.

"I will keep your secret, in exchange for another question," Hannibal says. Will bites his lower lip and nods. The panic is dying down but he still looks scared, and keeps looking out the door like he intends to bolt. "Who is the Alpha that gave you your Voice?"

Will swallows, a tremor running down his spine. "Margot Verger," he replies.

Hannibal frowns. "She is not an Alpha, Will," he says. "Her blood cannot change you like that."

"I know," Will replies. "I will tell you. The whole story, if you want it, but not right now." He looks at Hannibal, his eyes desperate, his scent still thick with anxiety and distress. "Please, Doctor Lecter. Have mercy on me."

Hannibal regards him for a moment, before he sighs. "Very well," he replies. "But I would like to know the answer soon. I will not have us proceed with any secrets from each other, Will."

Will's mouth twitches, and he lowers his eyes and huffs a strained laugh. "No secrets," he says. "You would expose both of us, then, for what we truly are?"

"Observations and confessions are not the same thing," Hannibal murmurs. "I would have both."

"Greedy," Will mutters. "But you may have your wish. Jack wants me to be turned over to your service for my 'mental wellbeing'." He spits the words and Hannibal wonders if Will's meeting with Jack is another reason he is so on edge today – enough to reveal one of his darkest gifts, all the more intriguing and beguiling because of it.

Hannibal smiles. "He hasn't told me that," he replies.

"I'm sure he will," Will says with a dismissive growl. "Goodnight, Doctor Lecter. I'm sure I'll see you very soon."

Then he turns and leaves, practically running to his car. He has his phone out and Hannibal cannot hear who he calls, but he can guess it's Alana. He hums and wonders if he will receive another visit from her, this time much more scolding.

He calls Bedelia and tells her to take her time tonight, since Will is gone – he tells her that some work errand called him away. She accepts the news, and tells him that she will go to her own home tonight. Hannibal finds himself without company and, for the first time in a while, missing it. He shouldn't have pushed Will so hard, but that is something Will conjures in him – a madman-like fever for answers and knowledge that he finds himself unable to sate.

He finishes with the food and eats, thinking of this new piece of information. Will has a Voice, which means he got close enough to an Alpha to bite him. If he is unmated now, then that means that the bite was not between a mated pair during a mutual play, knotting, or heat – or that the Alpha is dead.

He thinks of Margot Verger. Then, he thinks of Mason Verger. Will had known Mason as well as he knew Margot, that's what Alana had told him.

Hannibal smiles into his food, humming curiously. The next few days are going to be very interesting, indeed.

Chapter End Notes

Just FYI, this will NOT have any Will/Mason. All is not as it appears.

Chapter 7

Bedelia visits Hannibal for breakfast, and he cooks her salmon and eggs with spinach leaves, smiling at her over his cup of tea as she joins him in the dining room and eats. "How was the dinner?" he asks her.

Bedelia smiles, taking another bite and washing it down with water. Hannibal wonders if he would ever be able to make a dish out of meat and pass it off as fish. Perhaps some sort of tartare. He feels daring and mischievous today – it's a Friday morning, which means tomorrow is Saturday, and the dinner that Hannibal has so eagerly awaited is just on the horizon. Such a short and such a long amount of time away.

"It was pleasant," Bedelia answers. "I wonder about the university budget, that they keep hosting these events for us."

Hannibal hums, and resists the urge to breathe in her scent any more deeply than normal. She is careful, and always makes sure to wash before coming to his home so that all she smells like is her perfume. "They're likely trying to spend all their money before the quarter ends," he replies lightly. "Like the Government does."

She smiles at him, taking another drink of water. "It is unfortunate that Will couldn't play last night," she says, too evenly.

Hannibal tilts his head to one side and sighs. "Unfortunately that is what happens when working for the law," he says. "As Will said, murder doesn't stop for an ovulation cycle. So, too, do killers not think about the impoliteness of interfering with our designs."

"I'm sure I don't have to ask," Bedelia says, "but did you and Will behave appropriately in my absence?"

Hannibal smiles. "As appropriately as you did at your dinner," he replies. Her eyes flash, and she swallows. "Did Anthony say he would join us?"

"Yes," Bedelia replies, her voice quiet. "He seemed very eager to see you again. He misses you."

"I have not kept him away," Hannibal says.

"But we have both been occupied," Bedelia replies, raising an eyebrow as she focuses back on her food. She's eating slower now, as though the fish may have suddenly turned into something less savory. "Will texted me early this morning, apologizing for his absence." Hannibal hums. "I got the sense that he felt he had offended me, somehow."

"Omegas are very aware of social bounds," Hannibal murmurs. "Naturally, more than Alphas and women are. These are things we have to learn, and yet Omegas have it ingrained in them as a matter of survival."

Bedelia nods, giving a quiet sound of consideration. She sets her fork down and finally meets his eyes.

"What happened here last night, Hannibal?" she asks, flat and challenging. "What did you do?"

Hannibal raises his eyebrows, regarding her calmly. "I did nothing," he replies. And that is technically true – words are just words. Thoughts are just thoughts. He thinks of how frightened Will had been when he'd accidentally given away the existence of his Voice. Hannibal is certain that even now, Will is soaked in anxiety, pacing the floor of his home and wondering if, at this very moment, Hannibal is giving away his secrets.

"Hannibal," Bedelia says. A warning.

"He came for dinner. While it was still cooking, we talked. Just as you and I are speaking right now. Alana had told me that Will feels a certain complicated feeling when it comes to his son, and I informed him that Morgan Verger would not be in attendance at dinner tomorrow night, and that Anthony may come instead. He left soon after."

Bedelia hums, pressing her lips together. "Do you think Anthony's presence troubled him?"

Hannibal smiles. "Do you think it ought to?" he replies coolly.

"Omegas see each other as a natural threat, that is no secret," Bedelia says. "They regard one another like rivals to food, resources, and land. And to mates."

"Ah," Hannibal replies, and takes a sip of his tea. It's a green tea blend, infused with mint and lemongrass that reminds him of Will's scent. "But Will does not intend to pursue me as a mate. Nor does Anthony."

"Instincts are powerful things, my love. Sometimes they are hard for the evolved mind to overcome."

Hannibal regards her for a moment, meeting her gaze without flinching. "Are we still speaking of Omegas?" he asks.

She smiles, fond and soft. "You are the most evolved man I know," she says, and it sounds strangely similar to an Omega's placative whine. She reaches out and puts her hand over his, her wedding ring shining in the warm light. "But I would not begrudge you an occasional indulgence in thought, when it comes to your instincts."

Hannibal smiles and turns his hand to lace their fingers together. "If you're implying that I suffered from a lack of control last night, and that Will fled because of it, I can assure you that that wasn't the case," he replies. He sets his clear mug down and cradles his other hand around hers, pulling her fingers to his mouth to kiss them.

Her smile doesn’t change, and when Hannibal lets her hand go, she goes back to eating. "I will call Will and see if he is amenable to playing tonight," she says, and Hannibal nods,

pressing his lips together and wrapping both hands around his mug, soaking in the heat. It's not as soothing as Will's warmth.

"I have a late appointment this evening," Hannibal replies. "You should call him now – I may have to reschedule if it will mean we are not all up too late."

She hums, and stands. "Very well," she says, and goes to the study to retrieve her phone from her purse. When she returns, she has it to her ear. "Good morning, Will, I hope you're feeling better," she says, and sits back down. She reaches for Hannibal's hand and Hannibal lets her take it, smiling when he hears Will's soft voice come over the other end of the phone. He's too quiet for Hannibal to quite make out the words.

"Of course not. We understand. When duty calls, we are all compelled to answer."

Hannibal's phone rings, and he rises to go to the kitchen to answer. It's Alana. "Good morning," he greets.

"I'm at Will's," she says by way of introduction. She sounds angry. Hannibal can hear Will's dogs barking and the soft blurring sound of wind, and knows she's outside. Likely for the sake of privacy as Will answers his own call. "What did you *do* to him?"

Hannibal blinks, frowning. "Is he alright?"

"He called me last night, halfway through a panic attack. I stayed the night with him to calm him down," she replies curtly. Hannibal has never been on the receiving end of her anger before. He smiles. "I swear to God, Hannibal, if you hurt him -."

"I did no such thing," Hannibal replies coolly. Then, "Is he alright?"

"I asked you to treat him well," she says. "I trusted you to be kind to him. He barely slept, just kept pacing the floor and – damn it, Hannibal, what did you do?"

"I assure you, Alana, I didn't treat Will any differently than I would treat you, or Margot, or any of my friends," Hannibal replies. He is starting to feel deeply troubled – if Alana has her way, and speaks too rashly in the height of her anger, she could sour Will's regard towards this entire arrangement. And Hannibal is too entrenched in it now to cede the defeat.

He hears Bedelia stand and the sound of her heels clicking towards the kitchen. "I'll call you later," he says, and she gives him a terse 'Fine' before they end the call. Hannibal straightens and turns to see Bedelia enter the kitchen, smiling.

"Will has agreed to see us tonight," she announces, and Hannibal raises his eyebrows, because that news is at direct odds with what he knows. "He says he's available after seven. What time is your patient's appointment?"

Hannibal swallows, and tries to correct his mind from the maelstrom of discomfort to the conversation at hand. "Six thirty," he replies. "I shall see if I can move it to earlier, or arrange for another day." Bedelia smiles, and approaches him for a kiss on each cheek. "Leaving already?"

"I have a lecture soon," she replies, and Hannibal nods and walks her to the door. His own morning is relatively free, and he opens the door for her and sees her out. "I'll see you tonight, my love."

He smiles and kisses her again, and waits until she is in her car before he closes and locks his front door. With the slide of the bolt, the chaos in his mind slams back into focus. Will had clearly been even more distressed than he'd let on, and Hannibal wonders what Alana's sharp eyes saw when she had come to his home and kept watch with him overnight.

But Hannibal hadn't *done* anything. He hadn't chased Will, or tried to mount him or do anything unsavory to him without his consent. They'd been talking, verbally sparring as they have so comfortably before. Until Hannibal crossed a line – until that double-edged sword of observation came down on Will's neck and Will had felt rabid with the need to defend himself.

Hannibal's head feels hot and his teeth itch, and it takes him a moment to realize that this feeling sinking its claws deep into his chest is, in fact, worry. Protectiveness. He wants to rush to Will, to purr for him and cover his eyes and protect him from the fear clawing at his spine. Even though he is the source of it – but that's can't be true. Will cannot possibly be afraid of Hannibal.

Unless he sees something that makes him afraid. Just as Bedelia does.

Hannibal's phone rings again before he can set it down. He recognizes the number as Will's, but answers as though he doesn't; "This is Doctor Lecter," he says.

He hears Will suck in a shaky, tight breath on the other end of the line. Like he'd been drowning before he heard Hannibal's voice. "Come to me," he says, and it's powerful and quiet like the shockwave of a bomb. Hannibal almost falls to his knees, and clutches the edge of the countertop when he hears Will's Omega Voice coming through the phone. "Bring the mask and collar."

"Will -." But then Will hangs up, and Hannibal is left with the sound of the dial tone, trembling in his kitchen.

He growls, and sets the phone down. Will's mask and collar are in the guest bedroom, and he fights the compulsion to retrieve them, to dress and rush to Will as fast as he can. He tries to fight it, but finds himself going to the dining room with the intention of clearing the meal, and instead walks straight through it, out the other side and up the stairs before he registers that he isn't doing what he intended.

Anger stirs in the base of his spine, helpless and frantic as he takes the mask and collar from the guest bedroom, finds that the room is still maddeningly soaked in Will's scent and Hannibal's as well. Like the very paint hosts it, greedy and tantalizing Hannibal with forbidden fruit, the finest cut of meat he could ever sink his teeth into.

He growls, gets dressed, and goes to his car. He feels a tug in his chest, forcing him onward even though he tries to slow down and stop several times. The same protective urge hasn't faded, and now it has grown claws and teeth and is chasing him, hunting him down as he

speeds out of Maryland and into Virginia. The morning traffic is kinder to him that he had been the last time he made this trip, since it's a Friday and people are lazier with their commutes, but even then the hour and a half drive feels like it takes forever.

By the time he pulls up in front of Will's house, his eyes feel prickly and hot and his knuckles are white on the steering wheel. It is only when he sees Will's shadow at the window that he feels even a modicum of calm.

He takes a deep breath, trying to retain his composure. But it's lost – Will has speared him in place like a fish on a hook, and Hannibal came to his call because he had no other choice. The sudden loss of control is staggering and troublesome, and Hannibal wonders if Will fears how he will react to it, and that's why he demanded that Hannibal bring his only means of protection.

He gets out of the car and Will opens the door for him, ushering him inside as the dogs barrel out to relieve themselves. Hannibal thrusts the mask and collar into Will's hands and takes off his coat, laying it across the back of one of the chairs at the table by the window.

He stands behind it and rests his hands on the back of the chair, regarding Will with what he hopes is calm detachment. Will is looking at the mask and collar in his hands, his face unreadable but his fingers clenching them tightly.

"Will," Hannibal says, and doesn't like how rough and angry his voice is. Will's eyes snap to him. "What you just did was very rude."

Will licks his lips, takes a step back and holds the mask and collar to his chest like a shield. "I know," he replies.

"You do not need to compel me," Hannibal continues, the anger burning in his chest bright and fierce, now that he has Will in his sights. His anger has a direction and it is focused on Will with all the brightness of the sun. "I have now suffered through two conversations where my character has been put on trial. You are not going to play the victim and then turn around and force me to come to your side at your whim. I won't allow it."

Will swallows, lowering his gaze again. He lets out a quiet, plaintive whine, and Hannibal fights the urge to soften when he hears it. Will is trying to placate him and Hannibal knows it will work if he lets it.

"You can't stop me," he whispers, lifting his eyes once more. "But I told you I'd let you."

Hannibal growls, his fingers tightening on the chair. "I believe you owe me some answers, Will," he says. "I demand them of you. Or I will tell Bedelia and Alana everything that you have done."

"And what is it that I did?" Will replies sharply.

"You forced me to come to you," Hannibal snarls, baring his teeth. His eyes feel hot and itchy – what *is* that? "You used your Voice on me."

Will's mouth twitches at the corner. "Did I? Prove it."

"If I have to cut your throat and show everyone the growth on your neck, I will," Hannibal says.

Will's smile forms, widens, shows his teeth. He steps forward and sets the mask and collar down on the table, and sighs, bowing his head. He mimics Hannibal's pose, his hands resting on the back of the second chair, arms locked, shoulders tensed.

"If I had asked you to come, as a friend," he begins, "would you have?"

Hannibal growls, pressing his lips together and swallowing harshly when Will lifts his head. "Yes," he replies, because that is true.

Will's smile widens. "Without question?"

"What do you want from me, Will?" Hannibal demands. "I have been forthcoming and honest with you. I have given you every concession that I am allowed, and treated you kindly. Why are you trying to force my hand?"

"The words you use," Will hisses. "'Forthcoming', 'Concession', as if I am a willful child that you must indulge. You have split me open, and seen something in me that I cannot allow to go unchecked. Your curiosity will kill us both, Doctor Lecter."

"Do you want to end this arrangement?" Hannibal asks. "Say it, and it's done."

Will blinks, straightening up. Something like panic flashes across his face. "I don't want that," he whispers.

"Then I will have you give me answers," Hannibal replies. His temper is cooling, stymied by Will's anger and then his sudden fear. He straightens up and smooths his hands along the collar of his coat. "No games. No tricks. You and I will speak honestly, as equals to each other."

Will cocks his head to one side. His eyes drop to Hannibal's hands, and he swallows. "Would you like something to drink?"

Hannibal nods, and Will goes to his kitchen and comes back with two mugs of steaming coffee. He sets them both on his side of the table, and sits. When Hannibal follows suit, he slides Hannibal's cup over to him, careful not to put his body too close in case Hannibal tries to grab him.

Hannibal takes his cup and swallows his first drink of coffee, letting the bitter liquid scald his tongue and heat his chest. He sets the cup down and Will hums, drumming his nails along the handle. He sighs, and turns his gaze out to the window. Hannibal lets him stew, thrumming with an impatience he has so rarely felt before. Will conjures such strong emotions in him, it's almost frightening.

"Do you know what it's like to be a ward of the state?" Will finally asks.

Hannibal cocks his head to one side, and Will's eyes move to meet his, briefly, before they drop. "I lost my parents when I lost my sister," Hannibal says, "but I was never a ward. I had family and means to take care of me."

Will huffs, his mouth twitching into an off-kilter smile. "Of course," he says. "You are an Alpha. Alphas are always taken care of."

Hannibal thinks of Morgan Verger, and hums. "You have parents," he replies. "A father, and a mother. Even an Alpha sire you've never met."

"And they loved me," Will replies, and heaves another sigh. "They loved me until I started to behave strangely." He pauses, and swallows harshly. "Do you know what they do to young Omegas when they're not mated, but they go into heat anyway?"

Hannibal raises his eyebrows. "No," he replies quietly. "I didn't know that could happen."

Will smiles, sharp and amused. "Yes, you did," he says. "Play with them, get 'em slick, leave 'em hangin'." His drawl comes through, Louisiana born and bred, before it goes away again. "And that's if they're lucky."

"Lucky," Hannibal repeats.

Will nods. "Teenage pregnancies are on the rise in the lower class, Doctor Lecter," he says, and takes a sip of his coffee. "More and more children who don't understand the consequences of what they do. They touch each other and kiss each other because that's what mother and father do. That's what happens when you're in love. But then love grows cold, and people get scared, and there's suddenly a child in your belly and what can you do? Get rid of it? Face the wrath and the derision of society. Keep it? The same. Better to be loved and left behind."

"Pure entropy," Hannibal replies, and he smiles when Will huffs another breath.

"Without a Voice, you are completely without help. Without love, and without an ability to defend yourself. You must submit to the whims and desires of Alphas, or women, whatever monster happens to slither into your home." He lifts his eyes. "I am not a victim, Doctor Lecter. I don't pretend to be. But sometimes when that is all someone sees you as, you have to show them what they want to see."

"Did someone do something bad to you, Will?" Hannibal breathes.

Will laughs, and shakes his head. "Nothing so unrefined as that," he says with a dismissive wave of his hand. His eyes drop to the mask and collar, gleaming dully on the table. He sighs. "I feel comfortable in your presence, Doctor Lecter. And in that familiarity, discomfort grows."

"I find it's the opposite," Hannibal replies. "In the face of your chaos, I am strangely comfortable."

Will smiles, his eyes shining, gold and blue. He lifts his gaze to meet Hannibal's steadily, and then he stands. "I would like to show you something," he says. "If you want to see it."

Hannibal nods, standing, and allows Will to lead him outside, to the snow-covered barn. Will pushes open the doors with a low grunt, and they step inside. The innards of the barn have a weathered-looking fishing boat on a lift, and there are chains and ropes suspended from the rafters. Will leads him towards the back of the barn where there is a large cooler, half-hidden behind the boat.

He pauses, one hand on it. There's a padlock on the latch of the cooler, and he takes a key from under a pile of sailing rope and unlocks it, and pushes the lid open.

Hannibal leans in, peering inside. What he sees are blood bags, dozens of them, all O-negative. Universal donors. He raises his eyebrows and looks at Will.

"I don't hurt people," Will says, folding his arms across his chest. "Margot gives these to me."

"Is this…Alpha blood?" Hannibal asks.

Will nods. "A bag every week keeps my Voice intact," he replies. "The first supply came from Mason Verger."

Hannibal hums, cocking his head to one side. "And when he couldn’t supply any more, you turned to other sources."

Will smiles, and closes and locks the cooler again. He pockets the key and Hannibal gets the impression that its next hiding place will be somewhere else that Hannibal doesn't know about. "Will, I have to ask why," he says, as Will leads him back to the house. Will's dogs bark and run for them, absently petted and then shooed to one side as Will lets him back into the house. Only the brindle mutt comes in, and takes its place at one of the dog beds, dark eyes sharp on its master.

"Why I do it?" Will asks. "Or why I showed you?"

"Either," Hannibal replies. "Both."

Will smiles. Neither of them sit back down. "I cannot mate, Doctor Lecter," he says evenly. "My experience with Alphas has led me to understand that my needs cannot be sated by just anyone. And you called my mindset, my line of work, interesting. It is not interesting to everyone. But I must also be able to defend myself. Can you imagine if one of the killers I hunted turned out to be a mated Alpha, with a Voice of his own?"

Hannibal hums, conceding that. "This is not sustainable, Will," he says. "Your species demands a pack, and if you had an Alpha who could take care of you, you would not need to be afraid."

Will regards him for a long, long moment. "Last night…" He sucks in a breath and shakes his head. He rubs his hands over his face and through his hair. "I'm sorry about Alana. I'll talk to her. She's protective of me, and she is quick to anger when it comes to my wellbeing."

"An attitude she and I share," Hannibal replies. "Even if you are trying very hard to curb my regard for you."

"Trying," Will repeats. "Not succeeding."

Hannibal smiles. "Unfortunately, my dear Will, I'm afraid you just keep getting more and more interesting." Will lets out a shaky breath. "You seem obsessed with the idea that I threaten you, that I am imposing myself into your life by my own design. That is not the case."

"Whether by your design or not, you are there. Everywhere I turn, you are there. A shadow at my side. A demon in my dreams." Will's fingers curl around the nape of his neck and he shivers. "I can't be rid of you."

Hannibal's smile widens, and he holds his hands out to either side of him in an open, welcoming gesture. "Then I believe we are at an impasse."

"Or a battleground. I cannot retreat, nor can you. So we will fight, colliding and crashing together again and again until something gives. This is the kind of thing that makes earthquakes and mountains, Doctor Lecter. But this is more violent, and will create volcanoes."

"You fear your own destruction," Hannibal says. "But, also, that you will ultimately amount to nothing. Your likeness lives on in your son, but you will fade away into darkness." A tremor runs through Will, and his eyes flash, his upper lip twitching. "So you would rather become a legend of chaos and disaster."

Will turns away and goes to the table. "Thank you for bringing these," he says, touching the edge of the mask. "I will keep them here, for now. I can feel it coming – I'll go into heat soon."

Hannibal growls softly, and moves on Will's turned back. He takes a hold of Will's flank before Will can retreat – not that Will tries. He leans into Hannibal's touch and shivers when Hannibal presses his chest to Will's back.

"I can give you a legacy," he whispers into Will's ear. Will's eyes close and he breathes in deeply, shuddering with it. Hannibal reaches forward with his free hand and takes the mask, turning it in his hand. "I will give you children. I can give you sanctuary."

He lets go of Will, and places the mask over his face, pulls the strap over his head like the earpiece of a bridle and tightens it with a sharp tug. Will gasps, bowing his head and tilting it to one side so his neck is exposed to Hannibal's mouth. His hands fall to the back of his chair and tighten, knuckles turning white.

"I can sate that need you're too afraid to give voice to," Hannibal whispers, and kisses Will's flushed neck, delighted with the way Will trembles and lets out a soft, desperate whine. "You know I can." His hands find Will's arms, slide down until they encircle Will's wrists, until his entire body is covering and corralling Will in place.

"I hate how you make me feel," Will whispers, muffled behind the mask, but Hannibal can hear him well enough.

He smiles, drags his nose down the tendon in Will's neck, then back up, nuzzles his soft hair. He's breathing heavily and his entire body feels hot now, roaring at the scent of this sweet Omega pinned under his weight. "Tell me to stop," Hannibal says. "Command me to release you. Compel me."

I dare you.

Will gasps, and shakes his head. "No," he replies, challenging and rough. "I rely on your control to do what's right."

Hannibal growls. He wraps his arm under Will's, cups his throat, forces Will tighter against him, and opens his jaws to edge his teeth against Will's exposed nape. He could do it, consequences be damned. He could bind this feral, destructive creature to his whim, and mount him brutally enough that the heat teasing the edges of Will's psyche comes plummeting down the mountain like lava.

He has to stop. He *has* to stop. He tightens his hand on Will's throat and Will moans, shaking in his hold. Hannibal's eyes are burning and he abruptly realizes that it's because his own red is bleeding through, Alpha crimson to match Omega gold. Such is Will's influence on him.

He sheathes his teeth, and his bite turns into another kiss. He pulls back and Will sighs, bowing his head, and Hannibal takes the mask off of him and sets it down.

He takes Will by the shoulders and turns him, cupping his face with both hands and resting their foreheads together. Will's eyelids flutter, his lips part, and then he opens his eyes fully and stares into Hannibal's. They flash, seeing the red undoubtedly shining back at him, and Will smiles.

He reaches up and touches Hannibal's cheek in a gentle, affectionate gesture. "You've asked me what I want," he says, his voice hoarse. There are small lines along his cheek from the mask, breaking the red apart. "What do *you* want, Doctor Lecter?"

Hannibal smiles, and heaves a deep breath. Will bites his lower lip when Hannibal pulls away. "I confess, I don't know," he replies. Will's smile widens. "But I think, for now, I will say that I want to know you – the same way, I am starting to suspect, you would like to know me."

Will's eyes flash with something like approval. "That promises to be a very dark road, Doctor Lecter," he whispers, almost a purr.

Hannibal smiles. He pets through Will's hair one more time, tugging just a little, just to see how Will's eyelids flutter again and he sucks in a sharp breath. "I will see you tonight," he says, and Will nods, his eyes glowing and glazed. Hannibal takes his coat, shrugs it on. He feels like a general getting ready for war.

Will sees him out, and lets his dogs back in. Hannibal doesn't see anything of his shadow by the window, as he gets in his car and drives away.

Hannibal drives to Bedelia's home. Her car is parked outside – and, Hannibal notices, so is Anthony's. He smiles and gets out, walking up to her door and ringing the doorbell.

He waits for just the right amount of time that would justify a couple in the middle of lovemaking scrambling out of bed and hurriedly dressing themselves. He smells an explosion of perfume, before the door opens. Bedelia regards him with wide eyes. Her cheeks are flushed, and her hair is in subtle disarray in a manner that Hannibal knows intimately well.

"Hannibal," she says, and closes the door most of the way to hide his view of the inside of her house. How cliché – is Anthony trying to sneak out of the back door?

Hannibal smiles at her, content enough to let her think she might get away with it for now. "Hello, my love," he says brightly. "I was hoping to take you to lunch, if you're free."

She presses her lips together. The stink of her arousal is strong under her perfume, as well as the sweet musk of Anthony's scent on her hands and neck. Hannibal can almost see her heart pounding and wonders if she might faint from anxiety.

She meets his eyes and Hannibal wonders if the red is still there. They don't itch anymore, but he doesn't know if that's because it's faded away, or because he has become used to the sensation. He waits patiently, giddy off of her distress.

Then, she nods, pressing her lips together. "Give me a few moments to grab my things," she says, and opens the door for him. Hannibal steps inside and goes to her living room, where she normally conducts her sessions with her patients. He doesn't hear anyone moving upstairs and thinks that Anthony may simply be frozen, the fly not struggling lest it wake the spider.

She comes back into the room, better-groomed and frantically thrusting her keys and phone into her purse. "Shall we?" she asks, and he smiles and stands, allowing her to usher him outside. He notices that she doesn't lock the door. Perhaps Anthony has a key – then again, this neighborhood is hardly one where people need to worry about being robbed or broken into.

He leads her to his car and gets inside, humming as the car starts to heat. It makes her scent sharper, sweat and sex filling the air. He rolls down the windows and tries not to think too hard about all the fine meals he could make out of Anthony's flesh.

"I wanted to discuss something with you," he says after a moment.

She hums, her fingers fidgeting on her lap. Hannibal hopes she had time to orgasm before he interrupted. It would be rude of him to deny her pleasure.

"I wanted to propose the idea of taking Will as an Omega mate."

Her eyes snap to him, wide and disbelieving. She lets out a wounded sound. "Hannibal," she says, and reaches out to touch his arm. "Are you trying to replace me?"

Hannibal hums, pretending to be confused by the question. He knows that is one of her greatest fears – that she has finally marinated for long enough that Hannibal will cast her to one side, consume and devour her, never to be seen again. He smiles.

"Never, my love." He takes her hand and kisses her fingers, humming at the scent of an Omega clinging to them. Omegas crave meat when they are approaching and going through their heat and Hannibal thinks that he could feed Will for days with Anthony's flesh. "No more than you would try to replace me."

It's a sharp retort, and he senses that she knows he knows, in that moment. One more secret they must add to their ever-growing pile. He can smell her distress, sweet and bitter like sugared lemons.

"Why?" she breathes.

"Well, I think it would be practical," Hannibal replies. "Will is unmated, attractive, and intelligent. If he gave us one child, but was a mate instead of a surrogate, he would have no need for financial compensation. And it would be one more set of hands to rear the child and keep a home. It would allow you more free time – since you are so busy at the university of late. And it would mean neither of us had to sacrifice our way of life, no matter how many children he might bear. And, if he was a mate, he could bear many."

"Hannibal, he hunts *monsters*," she hisses. Hannibal comes to a stoplight and turns to look at her. She has gone pale with fear, her eyes bright with tears she's too proud to shed. "How long until he looks a little too closely at either of us?"

Hannibal smiles. "If we are monsters, then we should not be having children in the first place," he replies.

"Why are you bringing this up now?" she demands. "Did you do something? Is there already a bite in his neck and a child in his belly?"

"No to both," Hannibal says coolly. He quite enjoys the way her brain is so obviously running, frantically trying to find a way out of the mouse trap she didn't even realize she had walked into. "I won't force you to say 'Yes'. I was simply proposing the idea. And I haven't said anything to Will, or Alana, either."

She swallows harshly, pulling her hand away to lace both in her lap again. She faces forward, a statue of pain and defeat. But not defeat yet – Hannibal is sure she will find one more trick up her sleeve, an ace hidden away from the rest of the deck.

"Think about it, my love," Hannibal coaxes gently, pressing on the gas when the light turns green. "I think you will see the benefit of it, if you stop thinking of it as a threat to yourself, and more of an opportunity."

"An opportunity," she repeats icily. "You've known this man less than a month. How long did we date before you asked me to marry you?"

Hannibal smiles. "I am merely taking your advice to heart," he says. "Allowing myself to indulge in my instincts."

She swallows, huffing a strained-sounding laugh. "Of course," she replies, and rubs a hand up her other forearm.

Hannibal allows her to stew, driving aimlessly through Baltimore, with no real destination in mind. Prolonging the drive will make her feel more uncomfortable, and it's a punishment – her loyalty is gone, muddied like day-old snow on a highway. Hannibal realizes, in this moment, that Will has shown more trust and openness to him in the short time they have known each other than Bedelia ever has in the many years they've been married.

"It's your decision, my love," Hannibal says again, and smiles at her as he pulls up outside of an up-scale steakhouse. "And whatever you decide, that is what we shall do."

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

> I thought of the end of this chapter halfway through it and I didn't even get to that part because it's 7k and midnight and I'm tired but!! here you go!! :D

It occurs to Hannibal, in the middle of one of his appointments that afternoon, that there are other advantages to taking Will as a mate rather than using him as a surrogate.

Namely, that the contract will be null and void. Meaning he will not have to wait for Bedelia's presence to touch or play with him. If Will was his mate, Hannibal could mount and breed him at his leisure. He could pepper Will's neck with bite marks and bruises, rest his claws in the soft center of Will's flanks, train him to become slick at a simple look, or a low growl. He could gain his Voice and order Will to his knees whenever the mood struck him, and enjoy him in all of his glory without the shadow of his wife watching them to make sure nothing improper happens.

This thought strikes him as he listens to Franklyn babble on about cheese. Franklyn is an unfortunate case – he is an Omega, so thickly in need of companionship and a mate that he often becomes overly-friendly in the way he interacts with Hannibal. He is soft, and much too gentle for Hannibal's tastes. He is the kind of Omega that went to a finishing school, and it shows in the way he holds himself during their sessions. He is submissive and sweet, too eager to try and get Hannibal to talk and completely disregarding the whole point of therapy.

Hannibal shifts his weight, dragging his thoughts away from imagining Will sitting in his chair instead. A conversation and session with Will would be much more interesting – when he's in the room, Hannibal's attention is focused so wholly on him, like Will's presence fills his mind, his scent drowns Hannibal's lungs. He has the blood of foreign Alphas in him, but he doesn't *have* to. Hannibal could give him everything he needs.

He thinks of the cooler of blood in Will's barn, and imagines splitting the bags open and staining the ground in the middle of the night, so that the blood looks almost black.

He smiles at the thought, and Franklyn straightens, his eyes alight and glowing golden with misplaced pleasure, thinking that is it something he said that made Hannibal smile.

"I saw you shopping for cheese," he says. "I didn't want to say 'Hello', since you seemed so uncomfortable last time I did."

"This is a small city," Hannibal replies, and mourns the fact that Will does not live within it. Hannibal would much rather happen upon him in the cheese aisle – or, better yet, at his own home, sweet and waiting for Hannibal every night.

Franklyn's smile widens. "Jose's has the best selection of artisanal cheeses in Baltimore, city or county," he says, like it's a fact he should be proud of. "Cheese is a passion. Ever heard of Tyromancy?"

Hannibal nods. "Divination by cheese," he replies.

"I was my gateway to cheese. A magic 8 ball you can eat." Hannibal doesn't reply. He resists the urge to check his watch – that would be rude. Time flies by when he's with Will, in a way it doesn't when he shares company in his sessions, or the dinner with Adrian – even, to an extent, his friends. Then, Franklyn sighs. "Tobias doesn't eat dairy."

Hannibal cocks his head to one side, a flicker of recognition crossing his brain. Tobias – he had met the man at the opera, where Franklyn had so rudely interrupted his conversation with Mrs. Komeda. He remembers the Alpha, his tall and dark presence like a shadow at Franklyn's side.

He smiles. "Do you desire Tobias sexually?" he asks.

Franklyn blinks at him. "No!" he says, holding his hands out in a defensive gesture. "God, no. And I'm not being defensive." Hannibal hums, and wonders if Franklyn is afraid of offending him. If Franklyn is so attached to Hannibal, knowing he has a wife but no Omega, he might see Hannibal as an opportunity for companionship. An opportunity Hannibal has no intention of indulging.

"You care deeply about Tobias, despite having differences," he says mildly, and Franklyn presses his lips together and nods. He has no Voice, but his whine is clear enough. Hannibal resists the urge to tell him to stop – it's not something Omegas can help, more often than not. "He's your best friend, but you are not his."

Franklyn deflates. "It's sad when you say it like that," he murmurs.

Hannibal smiles again. "Do you often worry about being alone, Franklyn?" he asks.

Franklyn sighs. "I worry about hurting. Being alone has a dull ache to it, doesn't it?"

Hannibal presses his lips together, and thinks about Will. "Yes," he replies. He wonders if Will feels loneliness like a dull ache – if he feels lonely at all. He wants to create a wave that will put all of Baltimore in his shadow, but that kind of thing doesn't require a partner.

Then he remembers how eagerly Will had called for him that morning. If Will does desire solitude, he's doing a very poor job of showing it. "It can."

Will arrives at Hannibal's home at seven, just as he'd said he would. Bedelia is not here yet, which Hannibal finds strange, but not unexpected. She had suffered through lunch like she wanted to throw up with every bite, barely stomaching the rich red meat Hannibal had insisted she eat.

"You suffer from low iron, my love," he'd said. She'd been too afraid to refuse him.

Hannibal will admit that he has felt incredibly eager to see Will all day. So eager, in fact, that he doesn't resist the urge to put a hand on Will's shoulder once Will has his coat off, guiding him towards his study. Will goes meekly enough, but pauses when he realizes that Bedelia is not there to chaperone them.

He looks at Hannibal. "Where is your wife, Doctor Lecter?" he asks, but he's smiling like he already knows the answer. His voice is a purr.

"On her way," he replies smoothly, smiling when he gestures for Will to sit. "There is something I feel that we should discuss anyway, away from any third parties." Will's eyes flash and he cocks his head to one side. "But first, I mustn't forget my manners. May I offer you something to drink?"

Will presses his lips together. One of his hands flattens along the armrest of the soft leather couch Hannibal put him in. He nods. "Do you have more of that wine?" he asks.

Hannibal smiles, and nods. He goes to his kitchen to retrieve the wine aged in whiskey barrels that Will had liked so much before. He pours Will a large glass of it and then a richer red for himself, and returns to the study, offering Will his glass.

Will takes it with a grateful hum, sipping at the wine. He sighs and settles down in the couch and Hannibal takes a seat opposite him, in a more upright chair. Will watches him, his eyes shadowed and green in the low light. Hannibal gets the impression that he's being assessed.

Finally, Will takes another drink, and hums. "And what is it you want to discuss?" he finally asks.

Hannibal smiles. "You told me this morning that you cannot mate," he says, and Will nods, one eyebrow rising. "I'm curious where that mindset came from, and if there would be anything that might change your mind."

Will huffs, taking another drink. "I think you already know the answer to that," Will replies. "I am a void of darkness and entropy. Or whatever it was you called me." Like Will doesn't remember. Hannibal gets the impression that every word he speaks to Will is stored away, turned over and split apart like plasma in a centrifuge. "Why do you ask?"

"I have been giving a lot of thought to the subject of loneliness."

Will smiles, his other eyebrow joining the first. "Are you lonely, Doctor Lecter?" he asks.

"Not at all," Hannibal replies, smiling. "But I'm worried that you are."

"Worried," Will repeats, muttering the word into his hand as he wipes at his mouth. His eyes move to the fireplace between them, dead and cold for now. They're forecast for snow and Hannibal imagines he will light the flames soon enough as the days get cold, fighting the emergence of spring. "A lot of people seem to worry about me. You, Jack…Alana…"

Hannibal hums, reminding himself to call Alana when he and Will are done with each other for the night. Will sighs again and takes another drink. "I suppose, if I were to consider taking a mate, it would simply be a case of 'Right place, right time'," he adds, his eyes meeting Hannibal's. "I'm not much of a romantic. I don't believe in love at first sight, or first scent."

"What do you believe in?" Hannibal asks.

Will's eyes flash, and his lips twitch in an off-kilter smile. "Why should I tell you?" he murmurs, but the challenging words are softened by his teasing tone, his scent of comfort and pleasure.

Hannibal smiles. "Indulge me."

Will cocks his head to one side, and his eyes drop to his wine glass. He sighs, and Hannibal takes a sip of his own drink. "I value my freedom, above all else," he says. "My very livelihood depends on the idea and action of free will. I choose my own fate, and my own destiny."

"Is that why you hate so much how ingrained I have become to your life?" Hannibal asks. Will's eyes rise to his. "Jack's influence in you stymies that destiny. You cannot possibly live up to your full potential with his shadow over your head."

Will hums, a strangely insulted expression crossing his face. "Are you trying to alienate me from Jack?" he asks.

"I am trying to help you understand why you think the way you do," Hannibal replies smoothly. He takes another drink of wine. Will's eyes fall away again.

"You think, through helping me understand myself, you might understand me also," Will murmurs, and Hannibal doesn't reply because he knows that Will is right. "I feel as though you and I are dancing in darkness, and there is light on all sides of us. We can choose to become one with the light, or to flinch away from it."

There's a challenge in his voice, in his words. Hannibal can smell it as easily as the wine as he takes another drink. He smiles around it.

"The constant question of whether we will be devoured by our limitations, or choose to rise above them," he says. "I have always risen."

"Like a phoenix?" Will whispers.

"Like a conqueror," Hannibal replies. "We share that, in our namesakes."

Will huffs a laugh. "Mine died of his wounds," he says. "Yours, of suicide. Poison."

"He died so that the Romans would not bear in waiting for old age to take him," Hannibal confirms. "'Let us relieve the Romans from the anxiety they have so long experienced, since they think it tries their patience too much to wait for an old man's death'. That is one story. Another is that he got a fever from a wound, and died of it within three days."

Will smiles. "I think I know which story you prefer," he says. "Do you share that mindset, Doctor Lecter? Would you rather die than allow yourself to be a slave to your enemy's whims?"

"They are one and the same," Hannibal replies coolly. "I would think it the greatest insult to live as a captive."

Will regards him for a long, long moment, before he hums and tilts his head to one side, exposing the side of his neck. He shifts his weight and slides down on the couch, his knees spreading, the picture of relaxed refinement. "There was another murder today," he says, and Hannibal blinks, but accepts the change in conversation. "A man was opened up at the throat and his vocal cords were treated so that he could be played. A cello neck was thrust through his mouth." He swallows, his gaze going far-off, eyes glazed. "It really was a beautiful sound."

"You played this man?" Hannibal asks, and tamps down the flare of angry, misplaced jealousy that he feels at Will's awestruck voice.

"I heard his music in my head," Will whispers. "The music of the killer. A great symphony from a single touch." He looks back at Hannibal, his eyes sharpening again. "Most people think it is loneliness, or fear, that drives people into the utmost desperation. I would disagree. I think it is pride. An artist demands an audience."

Hannibal smiles. "Isn't that the point of art? To be enjoyed in all its wonder?"

"Not for you, I think," Will replies. "Your art would be there whether someone saw it or not."

"My art," Hannibal says.

Will smiles. "Your cooking," he says, something like reassurance in his voice. Like he doesn't want Hannibal to take his words the wrong way. "It is a masterpiece regardless of who is there to enjoy it. A selfish art."

"And yours is meaningless without a spectator," Hannibal says, and smiles when Will frowns. "You give these killers a voice, a life, and a name. You see through their eyes and give them identity. Through you, their art and their souls live on, just as through you, Morgan Verger is alive. Just like through you, my child will live."

Will's eyes flash. "You compare my children and my killers within the same breath," he says quietly, taking another drink of wine. "What does that make you?"

Hannibal hums, sitting back in his chair. "Perhaps, for now, my role is to simply observe, and bear witness."

Will laughs, delighted and fond. "Oh, Hannibal," he purrs, and the way he says Hannibal's first name, so casual and coy, strikes Hannibal hotly behind the eyes. "You are not a spectator." He pauses, and takes one last drink, finishing his glass. "And neither am I."

Before Hannibal can respond, he hears the front door unlock, and the unmistakable sound of Bedelia's heels on the hardwood floor. He smiles, and thinks he sees the light in Will's eyes brighten and sharpen with anticipation.

He stands and leaves the study, going to the door in time to see Bedelia take off her coat. "Will is here," he says, and she nods, her face pale and withdrawn. "I have not broached the topic of conversation we shared this morning."

She hums. "Good," she says sharply. "Shall we get started?"

Hannibal nods, and leads the way back to the study. He takes Will's empty glass and leaves him and Bedelia alone in the room as he sets the glasses back in the kitchen. By the time he returns, Will is standing, and both of them watch him expectantly.

He smiles, and steps back to allow Bedelia to lead the way up to the guest bedroom. Will follows behind her, Hannibal bringing up the rear.

They go into the guest bedroom and Will's jaws immediately part. He takes a single, ragged breath of air, his eyes falling to the place on the wall where Hannibal touched himself to Will's scent. Then, his gaze sharpens on the bed. He presses his lips together and his fingers curl.

Bedelia takes a seat, one leg crossed over the other, and settles down.

Hannibal recalls Will's mention of spectators. If they are not, she certainly is. She will not engage in the fight, but watch from the stands as the warriors beat themselves bloody against each other's fists and weapons until one of them gives out.

Will turns towards him, a dark knowledge and understanding on his face. Hannibal wants to savor that look, soak in the feeling of Will smelling him all over this room, his seed buried deep in the bedsheets, and know that Hannibal covered this room in his scent just for Will, because Will is the only one who would smell it with such sharpness.

He wants to, but he wants to soak the room with Will even more.

He takes Will by the neck and turns him, slamming him against the wall – more forcefully than he'd intended, but Will's eyes flash and his lips part and he lets out a quiet, ragged gasp, and Hannibal kisses him. It's rough, demanding, his free hand in Will's hair and his palm catching each heavy thump of Will's pulse.

Will moans loudly, his nails digging into Hannibal's shoulders, thighs spreading to allow room for Hannibal between them. He arches against Hannibal's chest, a soft whimper in his throat that Hannibal swallows, and he nips Will's lower lip, delighting in the way Will's breath catches and, when Hannibal pulls back, his eyes are shining and golden.

Hannibal tightens his hand in Will's hair and Will's eyelids flutter, but he keeps them open, remembering Hannibal's order from the day before. "Good boy," Hannibal growls, because he believes in giving praise where it's due. He keeps his voice as low and soft as he can, hoping Bedelia won't hear.

He pulls Will away from the wall and throws him towards the bed, shrugging off his suit jacket and tossing it in Bedelia's general direction. He doesn't look to see if she catches it. Will shivers, barely managing to get to his hands and knees before Hannibal covers him, mounting him dryly through their clothes.

He shoves Will's head down to the mattress and Will moans – this low and guttural thing, his jaws parted so he can drag Hannibal's scent over the roof of his mouth. Hannibal curls his fingers in Will's soft hair, tugging him up to his hands as Hannibal covers him and forces Will to bear his weight.

Will lets out a rough sound, his chest rumbling in some bastardized mix between a growl and a purr. He turns his head and rubs his cheek against Hannibal's jaw like he would if they were knotted, and Hannibal kisses his blushing cheek.

"Can you smell me here, Will?" he murmurs, and Will whimpers and nods. Hannibal smiles and wraps his free arm around Will's chest, flattening his hand over Will's stomach over his shirt. He shoves Will's head down again, sliding his hand to cover Will's cock through his slacks, and Will moans roughly, his fingers clawing at the bedspread as Hannibal presses his hips down against Will's. He can smell Will so closely now, and now that he knows it's there, he thinks he might be able to smell the thicker sweetness of Will's heat, lingering like dawn on the horizon.

It's saccharine, heady like honey mead. This is something Hannibal has never smelled on Bedelia, or any other Omega he has met – this scent demands he give chase, it's like a hunger sitting in his belly that can only be sated by one specific thing, and he finds himself eager to find it, to hunt for it like a wolf for its kill.

Except the source is right here. Sweet, dark, devastating Will, pinned beneath him and purring and whining so desperately.

"Hannibal, *please*," Will gasps, his face turned so that Hannibal can see his red cheek, his flushed neck. Hannibal growls and tightens his hand on Will's cock, before he lets out another rough, impatient sound, and unbuttons and unzips Will's slacks so that he can slide his hand under Will's clothes and wrap his cock around Will's sweat-damp, warm flesh. "*God,* yes – *yes*." And Hannibal doesn't know if it's because Will is approaching his heat, that he's become more vocal and desperate under Hannibal's weight, but Hannibal desperately, ardently adores the way Will's voice cracks on his name.

He opens his mouth wide on the back of Will's neck and Will trembles, whining loudly in his throat when Hannibal sets his teeth against the sensitive pressure points in his neck, sucks on Will's sweaty skin to taste the salt-rich flavor of him. Hannibal rolls his hips, growling loudly when Will shakes beneath him.

"Steady, darling," he whispers, and twists his hand around Will's cock. Will flinches against his chest, and the scent of his slick is thick in the air. Hannibal slides his hand through Will's hair and flattens his palm over Will's eyes.

Will whimpers, baring his teeth, and Hannibal smiles and kisses his cheek. He shushes Will gently, his fingers forming a tight ring around Will's cock as he starts to stroke. Will is

shaking like he's trying to keep sure footing during an earthquake, a ship tossed on wild waves and threatening to sink under.

Will lets out another needy, plaintive sound. It kicks somewhere behind Hannibal's ribs and he finds himself moaning as Will does, enchanted by the scent of Will's slick and driven mad with a haze of lust, knowing that Will can smell him and feel him everywhere. Knowing that it is by Will's consent and his design that they are in this moment, and knowing that, if Hannibal were to exercise his right as an Alpha and mount Will right now, Will would not resist him.

He ruts his hips against Will's, his erection thick and trapped in his clothes, and Will whimpers. "This is what you do to me," he rasps, growling the words into Will's ear. Blind as he is, Will can only hear and smell and feel him, sharp and strong like his whiskey-tainted wine. "You drive me to a point beyond reason."

Will gasps, whimpering quietly. He wraps one hand around Hannibal's wrist where it sits against his cheek. He turns his head and Hannibal kisses him, licks the corner of his slack mouth and bites his lower lip. "Take me," he begs, hardly any sound to his voice for how affected he is. "I come to kneel before your altar." Hannibal shudders, the words striking him the same way Will's Voice does – but Will isn't using his Voice. This is all him, pure and clean as fresh-fallen snow. As dark and sharp as the ice packed beneath it. Will tugs his hand away from his eyes and rises up onto one elbow, guides Hannibal's hand to his neck. "Dig a furrow in me," he growls, and Hannibal's nails turn sharp, digging into his neck. His cock twitches in Hannibal's hand when Hannibal does it. "Plant a seed."

Hannibal snarls. "I'll give you your legacy, Will," he vows, swears it as solemnly as any blood-oath given to any king throughout history. "Over and over, until there are enough children with your likeness to rival the tribes of Israel."

Will makes a sound like he's been stabbed, choking on his whimper as he abruptly goes still. His fingers curl tightly around Hannibal's hand on his neck, forcing Hannibal to hold him more fiercely as he tenses, trembling under Hannibal's weight. Hannibal can smell his slick and feel the heat of it on his fingers as Will shudders, his head bowed and his eyes clenched tightly shut. He spills thick and hot over Hannibal's hand, the knuckles of his free hand turning white in the sheets as he writhes and arches under Hannibal, as though Hannibal is buried deep inside of him and Will's satisfaction waits for his knot.

Hannibal parts his jaws and puts his teeth to Will's nape. He wants to bite down so desperately – traditionally this is when a mating bite would take place, when the Omega is too out of his mind with desire and endorphins to feel the pain of being bitten. Hannibal wants to do it, so badly that it feels like sin and hunger. He only resists because Will goes abruptly lax, and his neck falls away.

Hannibal growls, takes his dirty hand out of Will's slacks and fists it in his hair instead, uncaring for the mess. "Stay down," he snarls, and Will whimpers and obeys. Hannibal knows that he should really let Will use his mouth, encourage his heat to come forth more quickly and save the innards of his clothes, but he's too impatient. The thought of leaving Will's heat for even a second, even to the goal of Will's mouth, is unthinkable.

He grinds his cock against Will's ass, drags his nails along Will's neck harshly enough that he knows there will be lines left behind. Will gasps when he does it, his eyes opening and burning gold as Hannibal ruts against him.

Will reaches back, takes Hannibal's hand from his hair and places it over his mouth. He licks Hannibal's palm and sucks his dirty fingers between his pink lips and Hannibal shudders, curling his fingers behind Will's teeth. He wants to spear Will in place, hook and catch him as Will has so effortlessly ensnared Hannibal in return.

Will releases his fingers and braces his elbows against the bed, melting into the classic mounting position with ease. It's maddening, and Hannibal wants to tear his clothes away and get at the center of Will, where he's rich and sweet. He wants to drink Will's fertility from its source, gather it on his tongue and serve it as a glaze on Anthony's flesh.

He wraps his fingers around Will's wrists and covers him, and kisses him when Will turns his head. Will purrs against his mouth and bites Hannibal's jaw when Hannibal pulls away for air. Will lifts his head, nuzzling Hannibal's exposed neck.

"Hannibal," he whispers, and he's using his Voice, and Hannibal closes his eyes, shuddering harshly. He knows, even if Bedelia can hear the words, she can't hear the Voice. This is all for him. "Let go." Hannibal snarls, upper lip twitching. His stomach clenches, and his spine and the backs of his eyes feel hot. "That's it," Will growls, demanding and sharp.

Hannibal goes still, trembling with a rough growl as he buries his face in Will's nape. His hands tighten, his shoulders roll and tense, and he feels his release sink its teeth down his spine, rake his flanks, claw at his stomach as he spills inside of his clothes.

Will starts to purr, the vibrations of his back against Hannibal's body jarring him. Hannibal gasps, clenching his jaw, nuzzling Will's sweaty neck. He breathes in deeply through his parted jaws and he can smell Will's seed and slick in his hair from where Hannibal touched him. He's decadent, the finest example of his species Hannibal could ever set his gaze upon.

He could be mine.

Dangerous thoughts, Doctor Lecter.

Hannibal forces himself to rise, and helps Will to his feet. Will corrects his clothes and straightens up, clearing his throat. Bedelia rises and comes into view, a stark beige interruption to the brilliant color he sees in Will's eyes, staining his cheeks and neck. The pink of his lips and the streak of paleness in his hair.

"I think you should wear the collar next time," Bedelia says, holding Hannibal's coat to him without looking at him. Her eyes are on the dark marks Hannibal teased into Will's flesh. Hannibal bites his lower lip and touches his own mouth. He's sure he was careful. But he didn't bite, at least.

Will flushes, ducking his head sheepishly, though Hannibal senses it's more for show than anything else. "I'm sorry," he murmurs, as submissive and deferential as any house-trained Omega. "I'm getting close to my heat, I didn't think about it."

Bedelia hums. "The mask and collar are at Will's house," Hannibal says, and she regards him, as aloof as she can possibly be. Hannibal can smell her arousal, softer under Will's scent. Her pupils are dilated and some color has returned to her cheeks.

She arcs an eyebrow. "And how did they get there?" she asks.

"I had Alana bring them to me," Will replies before Hannibal can answer. Hannibal regards him and Will bites his lower lip, looking ashamed. "I'm sorry. I was – I don't know if Doctor Lecter told you." 'Doctor Lecter', now, not 'Hannibal'. Hannibal mourns the loss of his name on Will's tongue. "I got kinda…frazzled…last night. And it calms me down sometimes to know they're there. So I asked her to get them for me." He pauses. "I will bring them back tomorrow night."

Bedelia nods, once, sharply. "Good," she says, and sends a warning look to Hannibal, daring him to protest. Hannibal has no such protests to give. If Bedelia refuses his proposal of taking Will as a mate, it will be good to have those things. Hannibal is starting to doubt his own self-control. "I'll see you out."

"Thank you," Will says. He gives Hannibal one last look, his smile shy but his eyes betraying a dark, calculating process of thought, and then he ducks his head and the moment is gone, and he follows Bedelia out of the room.

Hannibal wants to chase him. He wants to take Will by his dirty hair and throw him to the ground and rip him to shreds. But he resists, and turns his attention instead to the need to change his clothes before his seed grows cold and itchy inside of his underwear.

Bedelia leaves as Will does, and then it is Saturday, and Hannibal is *elated*. He spends most of the morning hunting, which is no small feat, given that it's broad daylight on a weekend. But he manages – thankfully with the pending snowstorm, most offices are closed of extracurricular staff, and appointments have been canceled. As a result, the dentist and receptionist at an Annapolis clinic are easily disposed of and ferried back to his basement for dissection and harvest.

He will admit that he goes out of his way to make this dinner a particularly extravagant, performative affair. Will had said his art demands no audience, but that is not to say that Hannibal doesn't enjoy the appreciation an audience brings.

He calls Alana, aggravated again that he had forgotten to do so yesterday. She answers on the third ring. "Hello, Hannibal," she murmurs, and sounds much calmer and more forgiving than she had yesterday morning.

"Good afternoon, Alana," he replies brightly. He puts his phone on speaker and sets about binding the dentist's leg for the roast. "How are you?"

"…Better," Alana says. She sighs. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have snapped at you. I was angry, and spoke harshly."

"You spoke no more harshly than I might have, had someone I cared about been injured by someone I trusted," Hannibal replies. He is sure if the situation were reversed, he would have been much more violent in his reaction. "But I accept your apology, and offer my own. I did not intentionally harm Will, but he was harmed, and I feel that I should have prevented it somehow."

"Will is not someone we prevent, or predict," Alana says, and Hannibal can hear the fond smile in her voice. "He simply is."

Yes, Hannibal had noticed that right away.

"Are we still on for dinner?" Alana asks.

"Of course," Hannibal replies. "In fact, if you were willing, you and Margot may come over early. I have missed having you as my assistant."

Alana hums. "Do you have any of that wine you made me?"

Hannibal smiles. "A fresh store," he replies.

"Awesome! I'll tell Margot and text you when we're on our way. See you soon, Hannibal."

"Drive safely," he says, and lets her hang up the call. He hums a soft tune as he finishing wrapping the leg and covers it in bay leaves and oil, placing it in a roasting pan and sliding it into the oven to cook. It is the slowest dish to prepare.

Alana and Margot arrive a little after four. Hannibal greets them with smiles and wine, and they follow him into the kitchen with glasses in hand. Margot is practically giddy with joy, enthused at getting a peek behind the curtain.

Hannibal slides over a cutting board, a knife, and carrots and tomatoes to Alana. "Quarters and thin slices, please," he says, and she smiles and nods, setting her wine glass down. She washes her hands and gets to work.

"Margot," Hannibal says, nodding to her as he turns his attention to the careful arrangement of prosciutto flowers on another plate. "You're looking well."

Margot smiles. "It looks like you're ready to feed an army," she laughs.

"Well, six adults can stomach a surprisingly large amount," Hannibal replies, and winks at her. "It's not just Alphas who are seduced by good food."

She lets out a high-pitched, delighted gasp, covering her mouth. "Alana, I believe Doctor Lecter is flirting with me!"

"Watch out, Hannibal," Alana warns, playfully pointing the knife in Hannibal's direction. "She's mine."

"I hardly think I would be able to keep up with either of you," Hannibal says.

Margot hums, her eyes flashing and her smile going lopsided and sly. "Hmm. Yes. And how is Will?"

"Subtle," Alana says, rolling her eyes.

"What? We're all thinking it!"

Hannibal laughs and holds up a hand. "You can ask him yourself, when he gets here," he replies. Margot hums again and drums her nails against the stem of her wine glass.

"Who's this other person you've invited in Morgan's place?" Alana asks.

"His name is Anthony. He is a colleague and dear friend of Bedelia's."

Alana nods. "Alpha?"

Hannibal shakes his head.

Alana pauses, her knife halfway through a carrot slice. She presses her lips together like she's trying not to show her worry. "I'm sure I told you he was Omega," Hannibal says coolly.

"What am I missing?" Margot asks.

Alana sighs through her nose, and goes back to slicing carrots. "Nothing," she replies. "An archaic and sexist stereotype."

"Omegas, when forced to linger in close proximity, seldom get along," Hannibal explains, and Margot blinks and nods. "Alana is right – it's an outdated and incredibly insulting stereotype, designed to undermine the liberation and equality movements of Omegas throughout the decades. However, I have found in my experience that it is not unfounded."

Margot frowns, looking to her wife. "Are you worried that Will and Anthony won't get along?" she asks.

"Oh, I have no doubt that they won't," Alana replies, and a flicker of a smile crosses her face when she looks at Hannibal. "But in what capacity they don't get along – that's what I'm worried about."

"I'm lost again," Margot says with a roll of her eyes. "Being around Doctor Lecter makes you more cryptic."

Hannibal laughs. "You're not the first one to say so," he replies. "I will admit it freely, though – Bedelia suggested that we ask Anthony to be our surrogate, before you two introduced us to Will. I rejected the idea because I thought it would make things too complicated, to already have emotional and social attachment to an Omega we wanted to use."

"Ah," Margot says. "So Anthony is the competition."

"There's hardly a competition," Hannibal says, but he allows himself to purr freely at the comparison, knowing that Margot and Alana cannot hear it. And the words have two meanings – no one could possibly compare to the interesting puzzle that is Will Graham. "I am contractually obligated to remain with Will, until there is a mutual agreement from all parties that the contract should be voided, or until his obligations are met."

"How clinical," Margot replies, sighing and shaking her head. She looks to Alana. "Has he always been like this?"

"To a fault," Alana says, smiling, "but I think he doth protest too much."

Hannibal raises his eyebrows, and Alana's smile widens. Before they can say any more, Hannibal hears the door open. He gives the ladies a nod, excusing himself and going to see who is at the door.

Bedelia and Anthony are there. Anthony looks just as Hannibal remembers him – tall, his hair swept to one side, the shadow of hair on his face giving him a roguish look. He tenses when he feels Hannibal's eyes on him, sensitive to an Alpha's presence as any Omega is, and offers Hannibal a shy, hopeful smile.

Hannibal smiles back, deciding in that moment that he will pretend that he doesn't know about the affair at all. It will make everything much more entertaining. He approaches Anthony and embraces him tightly and hopes Anthony can smell Will on Hannibal's skin.

"It's good to see you again, my friend," Hannibal says. "I have missed you dearly."

Anthony's smile widens, trusting and cherubic. "Nice to be remembered," he replies, and Hannibal pets through his hair once before letting him go and giving Bedelia a chaste kiss.

"Come, Alana and Margot are here already," he says. "We have a small lull, and can converse in the study or dining room while we wait for Will."

He leads the way into the kitchen. "Alana, Margot, may I introduce Anthony Dimmond," he says, introducing the foreign Omega to new acquaintances as is proper. Unmated Omegas must often be introduced by the host Alpha or pack Alpha before being approached in conversation.

"A pleasure," Anthony says, kissing Margot's hand, then Alana's. Alana smiles and Hannibal doesn't miss how she wipes her hand on her skirt.

"I have a bottle of your favorite, Anthony," Hannibal says. "If you would like some wine."

"Please," Anthony says, rubbing his hands together. Hannibal takes out the bottle and pours some for Anthony and Bedelia. They have similar tastes. "Need to get a little warmed up. I thought it was supposed to be spring!"

"Winter isn't willing to let go just yet," Bedelia murmurs, taking a sip of her wine when Hannibal hands her a glass.

Hannibal smiles. "And because of it, we all get to suffer," he replies. Bedelia's eyes flash to him, suspicious but too nervous to say anything about it.

"Doctor Lecter tells us you work at the university?" Margot asks, turning on her bar stool to regard Anthony. Hannibal puts his attention back on the meal and Alana follows suit.

Anthony nods. "I worked as a T.A. in Cambridge, and did a brief stint in Italy, where I met Hannibal and Bedelia," he says. Hannibal finds himself bristling strangely at Anthony referring to them so casually. It shouldn't bother him – it certainly never has before – but there is a strange pack dynamic in this room, and while Will navigates such things effortlessly, Anthony is standing like a stick in the mud, interrupting the ambiance. "I taught at the university here for a summer and fell in love. I kept coming back and then just…never left."

Hannibal raises his eyes in time to catch Bedelia and Anthony's eyes meeting. Fell in love. With Baltimore, or with a woman? He presses his lips together and lowers his gaze again.

"So you have been friends for a long time," Alana says, drawing Hannibal's thoughts away. "It's a wonder we've never met."

Hannibal smiles. "Can't there be some mystery to my life, Alana?" he asks.

Her lips quirk and she rolls her eyes.

Then, the doorbell rings, and Hannibal feels like his entire soul leaps to attention at the sound.

"And that is likely our final guest," he says, straightening up and wiping his hands on a dish towel.

"I'll get it," Alana says, setting down her knife and vegetables. She leaves the room before anyone can protest, leaving them in the kitchen. Hannibal imagines she's going down there to warn Will what he will find inside.

Which begs the question; what is Will going to find? His incredible powers of observation will likely overwhelm him the second he steps into the room. Hannibal's nose is burning with the scents of cooking meat, roasting vegetables, and the exchange of pheromones and scents between the occupants of the room.

He hears Alana and Will's footsteps coming back, and lifts his gaze.

"Will, you know Margot already. This is Anthony. Anthony, meet Will."

Will and Anthony's gazes lock, and the room fills with static for a brief moment. Hannibal watches, ravenously taking in the way Anthony and Will visibly size each other up. Anthony is taller than even Hannibal, and while he normally walks with somewhat of a slouch and a bowed head, he stands straight when Will's eyes meet his.

Will doesn't rise to it. His gaze is sharp, fixed first on Anthony's eyes like he can read every secret in them, then they drop to his exposed neck, and then his stomach. Will presses his lips together and gives a short nod, offering his hand to shake.

Anthony smiles, taking Will's hand in both of his own and Will lets out a quiet, warning growl that Hannibal knows wasn't supposed to be heard. Anthony lets go and Will follows Alana to the other side of the room.

Bedelia hums, breaking the tense silence. "Do you need any help with the food, my love?" she asks.

"I believe Alana is more than capable of assisting me with what I need," Hannibal replies with a smile. "You do not need to remain in here on my account. Please, the study and dining room are open. Relax."

Bedelia smiles, and leads the way out of the kitchen. Anthony follows her like he's being led on a leash. After a moment, Margot rises and kisses Alana on the cheek, before she leave the room as well.

Will looks to the door, before he shakes his head and sits where Margot was. "I'll stay here, if you don't mind," he says sharply. There's a satchel slung over his shoulder and he lifts his eyes to Hannibal's, briefly, before they drop to Hannibal's hands. "I brought them back."

Hannibal hums. "Bedelia will be pleased," he says. "You should know, Will, that I wouldn't have forced you to."

"I know."

"Forced him to do what?" Alana asks.

Will sighs, rubbing his hand over the back of his neck. "I had Doctor Lecter bring my mask and collar to me yesterday," he says. "After I freaked out. After you left." Alana's eyes sharpen and she clenches her jaw. Will rolls his eyes. "Nothing happened."

"I don't care about that," Alana murmurs. "Why did you bring them back?"

"Doctor Du Maurier wants me to wear them when I go into heat," Will says. "Well, I mean, I want to as well. And it's gonna be soon. So they need to be here, or at her place. Somewhere where someone who isn't losing their damn minds can get them."

Alana sighs through her nose. She shakes her head and turns her attention back to quartering the tomatoes, as Hannibal takes the carrot slices from her and adds them to a bowl for a salad.

They work in silence for a long while, and it's comfortable and pleasant. Certainly much more pleasant than the icy fear his wife now wears whenever she speaks to Hannibal, and

more relaxing than the supercharged static that Hannibal feels whenever he is alone with Will.

"Here," he says, pouring some of Will's preferred wine into a glass, and hands it to him. Will takes it with a grateful smile.

"I'm not sure I should," he murmurs, but takes a sip anyway. "I find that I become rude when given wine."

Hannibal smiles. "I haven't thought so," he replies.

Will looks at him, his smile sharp and his eyebrows raised, knowing Hannibal is lying. "Do you want me to be rude, Doctor Lecter?" he asks.

"I want you to be honest," Hannibal replies. "You are not a slave, nor a captive. You have free will. Do with it what you must."

Will cocks his head to one side, regarding Hannibal for another long moment. Then, his smile widens, and his eyes flash in something like a challenge.

"Terrible advice. But I'll take it."

Chapter 9

When dinner is ready, Hannibal, Will, and Alana carry the dishes into the dining room to lay out the display. He has the dentist's leg as a roast, the prosciutto flowers made from the receptionist. There is a cut of loin splayed out with rich cranberry sauce, and a salad of winter greens. He also brings out a bowl of rice, mixed with dates and cinnamon.

Bedelia looks to him in question, and he smiles at her and brings out his last dish – her plate of oysters in a half-shell and a fruit salad as the side dish. She smiles at him with something like relief. Hannibal takes his place at the head of the table. Bedelia sits on his right, Anthony on her other side. Will sits on his left, next to Margot, and Alana takes the other seat at the end of the table.

He makes sure everyone's glasses are full, and brings out the decanters of wine – Will's and his own he places next to each other, then Bedelia and Anthony's white. He sets a fourth for Alana and Margot between the two of them, confident that Alana will be able to handle hers and her wife's intake on her own.

Margot lets out a low, impressed noise. "I'm not sure how we can possibly eat all of this," she says.

"I'm afraid you must indulge my resistance of doing anything in half-measures," Hannibal replies, smiling.

He stands and cuts the roast, dishing out thick slices onto each plate as Alana helps him with the rice and salad, until everyone's plates are full. Then he sits again and raises his glass. "Bon Appétit," he murmurs.

Everyone is silent for a while, quietly enjoying the food as they tuck in. Hannibal can see Will watching Anthony sharply, as though he judges the very way Anthony is holding his fork and knife, the way his neck moves when he swallows. He wonders what Will is thinking about.

Anthony lets out a pleased hum, setting his knife down so that he can take a drink of wine. He sighs loudly and looks to Hannibal with fondness. "Delicious as always, Hannibal," he says, smiling wide. Hannibal gives him a nod of thanks at the praise.

Then, he lets himself purr quietly. He wants Anthony and Will to hear it. He wants to see how Will reacts.

Will stiffens next to him, his eyes flashing. He lifts his gaze to Anthony and takes another bite of the roast. Hannibal has a fleeting moment to wonder who the largest outsider is in this gathering: Will, for his lack of refinement, or Anthony, for his encroachment onto Will's nest and play partner? "So, Anthony," he begins, his voice calm enough for the fire burning in his eyes. "What do you do for a living?"

Anthony smiles, indulgent and cordial. "I teach at the same university as Bedelia," he murmurs into his glass of wine. "Right now I'm assisting her with studies of abnormal Omega psychology. I find it fascinating."

"Do you think our breed is more prone to certain psychological defects?" Will asks.

"Oh, I think we're practically required to be. It's in our genetics," Anthony replies. He's smiling, and Hannibal can smell, sitting as close to Will as he is, how his scent thickens with something like anticipation. He is watching his prey creep closer and closer to the trap buried beneath the leaves. Or perhaps he has cast his lure, and is just waiting for the fish to bite. "The predisposition to be subservient, to please the women and Alphas in our lives. It can manifest itself rather dramatically, in my experience."

"Do you have much experience with broken Omegas?" Will asks.

Anthony shakes his head. "Purely theoretical, and in case studies," he replies. Will presses his lips together and hums, taking a sip of wine. Hannibal is practically giddy over the way Anthony visibly sizes Will up. "Have you?"

Will shakes his head as well. "My line of work does not lend itself to an Omega presence," he says. And that is true, from both sides of the curtain. "As you said, we are bred to please. That rarely turns into the desire to do harm."

"Will works with the Behavioral Analysis Unit," Bedelia says, her eyes on Will. "He profiles serial killers."

"Oh! Yes, I remember you telling me that Hannibal had become involved with that as well," Anthony says, and looks to Hannibal. "How have you been finding it?"

"Invigorating," Hannibal replies, smiling. "It has allowed me to see an excellent example of what happens when people are robbed of the right to proper psychiatric care."

Alana shakes her head, smiling indulgently. She takes a drink from her wine glass. "Sometimes people are beyond help, Hannibal," she says, but not to argue.

"It's not that they are beyond help," Will says, somewhat sharply. His eyes are on his food, as he cuts and eats another piece of meat and washes it down with wine. "How do you help someone who, through their own free will and their own decisions, chooses to do harm? You can't."

"It's hard to get psychopaths to see the errors of their ways," Bedelia says. She doesn't look at Hannibal, but just as she doesn't look, is it as obvious a jab towards him as if she had.

Will lifts his gaze, his brow furrowed and his eyes dark. "I'd caution assigning every killer the title of psychopath," he says.

Bedelia arches an eyebrow. "Too crude?" she asks.

"It's lazy," Will replies. "It allows no depth."

Bedelia smiles, sharp and thin. "Do you want to see depth in someone who can do such vile things?" she asks, and this time she does look at Hannibal.

"Everyone does," Will says, straightening up. He takes another drink of wine, but it's short, hardly a sip. Like he does it to force himself to curb his tongue. "The desire for human connection is not something just shared by Omegas, Doctor Du Maurier. Our greatest needs are to be seen, and understood."

"If someone wants to be seen and understood, there are other ways to do it," Anthony says mildly, at direct odds with Will's harsh tone. He cocks his head to one side. "You talk about these killers like you know them. Like you're defending them."

"If one of your case studies had turned to murder, would you not seek to understand them?" Will bites back. "If it's so unnatural, so abnormal, surely that piques your curiosity."

"Not at all," Anthony replies, his tone distant and superior. He smiles when Will regards him. "But as you said; when it's someone who chooses to do the things they do, there is nothing that can be done to help them. I do not desire to know the mind of a man who would kill people in cold blood."

"So you choose to look at them as broken, instead," Will says. "Did it ever occur to you that these Omegas you study are, at any point, fully aware of their actions?"

Hannibal thinks of the Omega case Bedelia had posed to him. She'd said Hannibal's reasoning was too practical; an opinion he does not share. Nor, he thinks, would Will.

Anthony meets Will's gaze for a long moment. "No," he replies coolly.

Will swallows, and takes another drink of his wine. His glass is almost empty, and Hannibal reaches over and takes it, standing as he refills it from Will's decanter.

"That mindset is dangerous," Will murmurs as Hannibal pours. "If you think you are smarter than those you study, and you think you have the higher playing field because they are 'broken' and you are not, you must not be surprised when one of them eventually outwits you."

Hannibal pauses, and sets Will's glass back down. Will takes it and drinks again.

"But," Will adds, "your studies are theoretical." He smiles at Anthony, sharp and ready. The fish has been caught on the hook. "I'm sure you have nothing to fear."

Hannibal swallows a bite of rice so that he does not smile. Underneath the table, his knee touches Will's, and he sees Will's shoulders loosen somewhat. It is a reward; Hannibal wants Will to know that he takes pleasure in Will's spar, that Will is Hannibal's chosen champion. As if there could be any doubt now.

Alana clears her throat after a moment, and Hannibal smiles at her. "Margot and I were thinking of taking a trip to Europe this summer," she says, breaking the tension abruptly at the change in conversation.

"Oh, whereabouts?" Anthony asks.

"We haven't decided," Margot says, piping up. Her plate is mostly empty since she hasn't said much in the way of conversation yet. "We were actually hoping to get some recommendations, since you are all much better-travelled than we are."

"I'll be the first to recommend Italy," Hannibal says, and Bedelia and Anthony nod along in agreement. "If only for the food."

Alana huffs a laugh. "I suggested Italy, but I was also thinking Germany. I think I would like to see the mountains."

"Why not both?" Bedelia suggests, smiling.

Margot smiles. "We don't want to be gone too long," she says. "If I had my way I'd spend a great deal of time in each country."

"How long will you be gone?" Will asks, quietly.

Alana looks up and presses her lips together. "Hard to say," she replies. "No more than a month, most likely. I can't take too much time away from my work."

"Will Morgan be going with you?" Will adds, his voice more strained now. He isn't looking at either of them, his attention fixed forcibly on his food.

Margot nods. "It'll be difficult travelling with an infant," she says. "Another reason we don't want to be gone too long."

"I would suggest waiting until he's older, and can appreciate it," Will says. He spears a bite of his roast and eats it, his teeth scraping along his fork. He chews once and swallows the bite whole.

Alana pauses, pressing her lips together. Hannibal remembers saying that Will had trouble getting the mental fortitude up to see his son, but it would likely distress him even more to know that he was physically unable to should the desire strike him. "Maybe," she finally concedes. "I wouldn't ask anyone to watch him for that long. And I don't think Margot or I would be able to bear being separated from him."

"Morgan is your son?" Anthony asks, and Alana's eyes flash to him, and she nods. "Did you adopt?"

"Kind of a personal question," Will growls.

Margot puts a hand on his arm, smiling in reassurance. "My brother graciously agreed to donate his sperm," she says brightly. "Alana carried him."

Hannibal smiles into his wine, proud of the way Margot so effortlessly side-stepped Will's involvement, and implied a happy and neat arrangement between them.

Bedelia smiles, arching an eyebrow. She sits back and holds her wine glass to her chest. "Will was a surrogate for them," she adds, her tone icy and pleased when Margot looks at her with wide eyes. "It's how we were introduced, when Hannibal and I were facing similar circumstances."

The entire room goes tense. Hannibal wants to growl at her. His fingers curl and he bites his tongue so that he doesn't raise his voice.

Anthony's eyes meet Will's, and the tension in the room ramps up to a thousand-fold. "Interesting," he says after a moment. "So this would be the second time you agreed to breed for your friends."

Will bares his teeth, his eyes flashing. "It's none of your business what any of us choose to do," he says.

"I find it fascinating," Anthony says. Then, his smile widens. "I look forward to reading about you in a case study."

Will stands abruptly, his chair scraping back. He growls, and there's a thread of his Voice in it. Anthony blinks and sits back and Hannibal goes stiff, hearing it. If Will continues to use his Voice, Hannibal will be compelled to do whatever it is Will demands of him. This is a dangerous, knife-edged moment.

"Will," Alana whispers.

Will's eyes move to hers, and he must see something there that calms him down. She is the light in the room for him, he said so himself. He presses his lips together and takes a deep breath.

He takes his wine glass, holding it like he's about to give a toast. "Again, I caution you," he says, meeting Anthony's wide-eyed gaze again. "There's a difference between being broken and being totally aware. Do not presume you know which of those things that I am."

He tilts the glass back and empties it, swallowing it in one loud gulp, and sets it down. He gives Hannibal an apologetic smile. "I need some air," he says. "I'll be outside for a moment."

Then, he leaves towards the front door. Hannibal stands immediately as he goes, held back by Bedelia's hand on his arm. "Let him go, Hannibal," she says, somewhat coldly.

He pulls his arm away from her. "He's been drinking," he says. "If he wants to drive right now, it is my duty to advise him against it." He hopes Bedelia can hear his anger. He hopes she feels it like an icy set of claws around her heart. "If you'll excuse me."

He leaves just in time for Anthony to say; "Gosh, he's a bit dramatic, isn't he?"

Hannibal snarls to himself, rounding the corner just in time to see the door close. He grabs his coat and gloves and follows Will outside.

He finds Will at the gate, the snow falling around him like something out of a dream. His breath mists and it's dreadfully cold and there is already an inch of snow on the ground.

Hannibal walks towards him and Will doesn't turn, though he must feel Hannibal's eyes on him.

He has his coat on, but he's shivering, his face bathed in the street lights as he looks up, angelic and beautiful. In the crisp, cold air, Hannibal can smell the sweetness of Will's scent. He's coated with anger and still, beneath that, sits the beginnings of his heat, teasing Hannibal like the vein of gold running through a mountain.

Hannibal comes up beside him, and for a moment the two of them simply stand as the snow wets their faces and hair and thickens on the ground.

"I don't smoke," Will murmurs. "But I think I want a cigarette. Or something stronger." He huffs, the corner of his mouth twitching upwards. "So long, security clearance."

Hannibal smiles. "I won't indulge your self-destruction," he says. "I would encourage your desire to destroy all else."

Then, Will lets out a low growl. "He thinks I'm broken," he mutters. "They all do."

"I don't," Hannibal replies.

"That's a relief," Will says, and his sarcasm is ruined by his soft tone. Hannibal's presence relaxes him, of that, Hannibal has no doubt. Will turns to regard him and Hannibal follows suit, so they stand like sentinels between the hostile ground of Hannibal's home, and all the opportunity that awaits them in the world. "Alana tries not to, but she does. She thinks of me as a sapling, snapped by a wayward hand, and she gives me a stick in the hopes I might grow strong again. But now I'm a giant oak tree and all she sees is that small, fragile stalk."

"Margot and Alana love you," Hannibal says. "They want what's best for you."

"And what do *you* want, Doctor Lecter?" Will replies sharply.

Hannibal presses his lips together, and sighs through his nose. He had hoped to get Bedelia's answer before broaching this subject with Will, but it is quickly becoming apparent that, even if she should agree, it would be a far from harmonious household. And if chaos and destruction are promised on all sides, Hannibal demands that he choose the means in which it devours him.

"I'll confess, last night, I didn't get the chance to speak with you on the subject I had originally wanted to," he says. Will frowns and tilts his head to one side. "You've asked me what I wanted, and I said I didn't know. I'm still not quite sure. But this dinner has confirmed something for me that I had long suspected." He smiles. "You are not asking the right question, dear Will."

"Oh?" Will says. He digs his hands into the pockets of his coat and draws the edges closer around each other. "Enlighten me."

"The question you should be asking is not *what* I want, but rather, *who* I want."

Will blinks, and scoffs. "I know what men like you want," he says, his voice dark with knowledge that only past experience can bring. "You want a shiny plaything, a piece of fine china to parade at dinner parties. You want someone fat and wet with children and submissive to your will."

"Now, Will, I thought you were beyond such broad strokes."

Will shivers, biting his lower lip. Then, he sighs. "You're right," he murmurs. "There are no men like you."

Then, he raises his head to the sky again, and presses his lips together. "Alright, Doctor Lecter," he says, and lowers his gaze so that his eyes lock with Hannibal's. "Who do you want?"

It's a challenge, another fishing line with the perfect bait just waiting for Hannibal to bite. And Hannibal must bite, if he is to get what he wants. "You know the answer."

"Tell me," Will demands.

"When Bedelia and I first agreed to a surrogate, I had no experience with Omegas in any depth, except with Anthony and those I treat as my patients," Hannibal says. Will's eyes flash with impatience but he doesn't say anything. "We met another Omega. His name was Adrian. He was young, and pretty. A delightfully suitable choice for a surrogate, or a mate."

Will growls. "Why, then," he begins, "did you not choose proper Anthony, or delightful Adrian?"

"Because they were not interesting," Hannibal replies. "To be seen and to be known – that is not a gift I would share with just anyone. I have no interest in gathering more fine china or delicate teacups, Will – I have plenty of those, and enough shiny things to satisfy me." He pauses, and smiles, giving a somewhat deprecating huff. "Of all the people I have met, a handful have kept my interest beyond casual acquaintance. I find most of humanity boring."

"Am I suppose to be pleased, that my body and my neck has kept your interest so far?" Will snaps.

"You misunderstand, Will," Hannibal says. He takes a step forward and pulls Will's hands out of his pockets, covering them with both of his own. Will's fingers curl against his gloved palms and Will can't keep his gaze. He drops his eyes to Hannibal's chest. "My affection is not something to compete for, nor a prize to be won. I give it, or I don't. I find myself wanting to give it to you. Wholly. Freely."

Will shivers, his breath misting in the air. He pulls his upper lip back like he wants to snarl, wants to pull away, but the expression fades as quickly as it had come.

He looks up and meets Hannibal's eyes, shining with gold. "Who do you want, Hannibal?" he asks again.

Hannibal smiles. "I want you, darling," he says. Will sucks in a sharp breath, his fingers curling up more tightly. Hannibal lets one of his hands go and raises Will's hand to his lips, kissing his cold, pink knuckles. "I want you by my side. I want to stand with you on the wave of destruction you will bring down upon the world. I want to sire your legacy."

Will lets out his breath in a shaky exhale. He presses his lips together and his throat moves when he swallows. "You are a cruel man," he breathes. He pulls his hand away and takes a step back. "You can't say things like that to me."

"And why is that?" Hannibal asks.

"Because you know I want them, too," Will bites out. "You offer me kindness and freedom with an outstretched hand, but hold a collar and leash behind your back."

"Destroy the mask and collar," Hannibal says. "Be rid of them. I don't need them. Neither do you." Then, what Will said hits its mark in his chest. "You…want it too?" he asks.

Will presses his lips together. He digs his hands into his pockets and looks down, nodding. "Desperately," he whispers.

"Then you have it," Hannibal says, and holds his arms out to either side of him. Will looks up at him. "My affection, and my love. I want to give it to you, in all your darkness and chaos."

"What does *she* have to say about all of this?" Will growls, challenging and harsh.

Hannibal smiles. "I told her already that I want you," he says. "I have not received her answer. But I'm finding myself caring less and less about what it is. She has treated you very cruelly, and I feel more and more offended on your behalf." He sighs, and drops his arms. "You delight me, Will, in a way seldom else has. I don't know what else I can say at this point to have you believe that."

"My issue isn't from lack of belief," Will replies. "I can smell how much you want me. I can feel it in your touch, hear it in your voice whenever you speak to me." He shakes his head. "Have I consumed your dreams and thoughts like you have consumed mine?"

"In their entirety," Hannibal says.

They stand facing each other like a bride and groom at the altar. Hannibal has never felt more exposed, more unsure. He thinks about taking Will by the hair and kissing him, biting him in the quiet snowfall. He wants to wet his teeth with Will's blood, wants to gain his own Voice and drink the power from Will's neck. He wants it, not for the glory of the hunt or the satisfaction of the kill, but because it feels as though he has traveled a thousand years to this moment, and stands before the throne of a God, and has asked that God to grant his faithful servant one request.

Will sighs. The cold cloud of his exhale wafts away like smoke from a fire that is lit to burn the bodies of the dead after a war. It's a peaceful moment for all the turmoil Hannibal feels in his chest.

"My whole life," Will whispers, "I have heard noise. Symphonies, war cries, and songs. Killers who have performed great artistry as though desperate that I alone might hear them." He looks at Hannibal, and his lips curl in a smile. "With you, there is silence."

He takes a step forward and rests a hand on Hannibal's chest. "I would let you bite me," he says, and Hannibal sucks in a breath. "I would let you sire my children. I would burn to ash the remnants of my former life, with all its shadows and upsets, if you commanded it of me."

"I would not command you to do anything," Hannibal says, and folds his hands over Will's, holding it tightly.

Will smiles. "And that is why I'd let you," he murmurs. Then, he pulls back, and his hand pulls away. "We should get back inside, lest your wife give away all of our secrets to our new friend."

"Friend?" Hannibal repeats, but smiles as Will leads the way back into the house.

"I do not care about him or his influence enough to call him my enemy," Will replies. Then, he pauses, just outside the door. "I feel that Anthony holds a very strong attachment to you and your wife," he adds, raising an eyebrow when Hannibal smiles.

"More to my wife, than to me."

Will hums. "I didn't think someone like you would tolerate such an…attachment."

"I will tolerate a great deal in the name of love," Hannibal says. "And for the sake of contentment. Anthony makes Bedelia happy. When a woman is happy, she pays less attention to certain things."

"Certain things," Will repeats. "Is this that darkness you and I dance in?"

"You would not force Alana to bear your secrets," Hannibal says. "Between man and wife, there can be none."

"She has secrets," Will says. "Just because you know about them doesn't erase the dishonesty."

"We all have secrets, Will," Hannibal replies. "If you accept my offer, you will know mine. And I will know yours."

Will's smile widens. "To the truth, then," he says. "And all its consequences."

By the time they return, the plates are almost empty and everyone's wine glasses need refilling. The snowstorm has started to come down very heavily, and Will apologizes for his abrupt departure from the dinner. Alana seems worried, but relieved that Will has, indeed, returned.

"The storm is worse in Virginia," Margot says when it comes time to depart. "The news says there's already a foot on the ground."

"They won't have started plowing yet," Alana adds, sounding worried.

Hannibal smiles. Will shrugs. "I can make it."

"Will, I cannot in good conscience allow you to drive home in this weather," Hannibal says. "The roads are treacherous, and your home is hard to reach in good climate. Please, allow me to offer you the guest room."

Will's eyes flash, and Bedelia hums. "I need to drive Anthony home," she says, like a warning. "I shall return tomorrow morning."

"Of course," Hannibal says, and kisses her on the cheek. "Please, everyone drive safely."

"We'll text you when we're home," Alana says, and embraces Will tightly, one hand in his hair as he buries his face in her neck and breathes in deeply. "Have a good night."

They leave, and Hannibal catches Bedelia's eye. "A word, my love?" he asks, and she nods and follows him into the kitchen. He turns to face her, spearing her in place. "You must decide now," he says.

She goes pale, and swallows. "Decide?" she asks.

"Yes," Hannibal says. "I spoke with Will, and told him I wanted to take him as a mate. He agreed, if you give your consent." Not entirely true, but he will not further besmirch Will's character in her eyes.

She presses her lips together and shakes her head, looking down. "Hannibal -."

"Decide," he growls, sharply. "'Yes' or 'No'."

She doesn’t answer. She has the look of a cow that has just seen the entrance to the slaughterhouse. Hannibal wonders if she had intended to lay with Anthony tonight, since she says she has to drive him home. Hannibal has no doubt that one of them will end up in the other's bed.

To the truth, and all its consequences. "I will trade you," he says, and she looks up. "Consent for consent. Will, for Anthony."

Her eyes widen and what little color remains in her cheeks drains away. "Anthony?" she repeats weakly. "What do you mean?"

"My love, do not do either of us the discourtesy of pretending," Hannibal murmurs. "You know that I know. I have been willing to overlook it, because he clearly puts you more at ease than I ever will. You have behaved very rudely, tonight and regarding Will in general. I will no longer allow it. So, you must decide. If I cannot have Will, you may not continue to have Anthony."

"These are men, Hannibal," she says coldly. "Not trinkets to buy and sell and your whim."

"You turned Anthony into a trinket when you decided to hide him from me, to steal him away like a treasure from a robber. And you turned Will into a trinket when you treated him as a commodity. Let us be open and honest with each other, my love, and we can move past this."

She swallows harshly. Hannibal approaches her and puts his hands on her arms, embracing her gently. He can smell her fear, and imagines he can hear her heart pounding.

"I offer you my forgiveness," he murmurs. Her eyes are wide and glassy. "And my consent, if you offer me yours."

She presses her lips together, tilts her head to one side to show her neck in a way she has never done before, and nods. "You have it," she replies. Hannibal smiles and lets his hands fall. Her eyes brighten with tears and she rolls her shoulders, straightening up, assuming the mantle of a woman who has no care in the world. "I hope he makes you happy, Hannibal."

"I hope Anthony makes you happy," Hannibal replies. She nods tightly, and turns and strides out of the kitchen and to the front door. She and Anthony leave without another word.

Hannibal finds Will in the dining room, nursing his wine. The table looks empty and barren without all the fine food on it, but not lost like salted Earth. Rather, it is an opportunity for rich and verdant fields, to be plowed and tended and from which a bountiful harvest will sprout.

Hannibal sits, and Will smiles at him. "Congratulations, Doctor Lecter," he murmurs, and Hannibal raises his eyebrows. "I think Zama has finally been conquered."

Hannibal smiles. "And neither of us have wounds to bear," he replies, and touches his wine glass to Will's. He regards Will for a long, long moment. "I think, Will, if I were to see you every day for the rest of my life, I would remember this time."

Will hums, and takes a drink. "Me, too," he replies softly. He rubs the back of his neck and sighs. "Am I correct in assuming she gave her consent?" Will asks. He looks at Hannibal again. "Am I to be played with and courted as any Omega might with an unattached Alpha?"

"Yes," Hannibal says. Simply. Plainly. Openly.

Will's smile turns sharp, anticipatory. His eyes are bright and golden-blue. "Excellent," he purrs. "I'm looking forward to it."

Chapter 10

It occurs to Hannibal, and not for the first time, that the art and practice of courting Will is going to be a difficult one. For starters, they have done things almost entirely in the reverse. Despite the fact that Hannibal has never dated or courted an Omega before, he was required in his studies in medicine to learn the subtle changes in hormones and body that comes over Alphas and Omegas when they court, and play, and during the times an Omega is in heat and pregnant and how it would differ from a female pregnancy.

But that is another thing: all of what Hannibal has come to expect is purely theoretical. Like Anthony with his 'broken' Omegas. Hannibal has no first-hand experience of it, and through his lack of experience, he must rely on the facts and studies he has read. But Will has proven time and again that he is the furthest thing from a typical Omega.

The few women Hannibal had dated before Bedelia were fleeting affairs. He did not lie when he said he struggled to maintain an interest in people after the first few times meeting them. His observational prowess had given him far too much insight, and when the flaws start to outweigh the potential, he finds himself lacking the motivation to forge a stronger bond.

With Will, all there is, is potential. Pure, molten gold, ready to be cast and shaped into whatever Hannibal sees fit. The possibilities at this point are almost entirely limitless, now that Hannibal has received Bedelia's permission to court and mate with Will as any Alpha would.

And Will wants him *back*. That thought alone is staggering. Will's affections and attention has been entirely reactionary up to this point – he comes when called, and meets Hannibal blow for blow when they play, and though he has spoken of wanting to be more open and engaged with Hannibal, he has not allowed himself to do so for fear of Bedelia's negative reaction aside from the time Will commanded Hannibal to his home. Now, neither of them have anything to fear, and as a result, Hannibal finds himself frozen.

The snow is still coming down heavily. Hannibal can see it out of the window of his dining room. He's sitting across from Will, in the space Bedelia occupied during dinner. He can smell her perfume lingering in the air. Will has his decanter and wine glass in front of him, and Hannibal has his, and they stare at each other like two gunslingers ready for a shootout, watching for the twitch of the finger, a narrowing of the eye, that will give away the precise moment in which to act.

This night can go one of two ways: either Hannibal succumbs to his desires and asks Will to join him in his bed, or they will both end up in their own rooms, perfectly proper and nothing hinting at a scandal. He wonders which option Will would see as the greater victory.

Will smiles, like he can sense Hannibal's thoughts. He lets out a soft hum and takes a sip of wine. "You seem hesitant," he murmurs.

Hannibal raises an eyebrow, and smiles. "Hesitant? No," he replies. "Is there a reason I should be?"

Will regards him coolly, his fingers flattening out on the table around his glass. He's not wearing his fake wedding ring today, and Hannibal wonders if that's by design. Another thing Anthony wouldn't ask about. "I'll confess to my lack of experience," he murmurs. "I've never been courted before."

Hannibal cocks his head to one side and lets out a soft hum. "I cannot possibly believe that's true," he replies.

"It is," Will says, smiling. "Oh, sure, I've let Alphas touch me. And I've dated women. But I've never been *courted*."

Hannibal swallows back the possessive growl that tightens his throat at that knowledge. Of course, as pretty as he is, and as bitter as Will is towards the whole idea, Hannibal has had to acknowledge that Will has had somewhat of a past when it comes to relationships, but hearing Will outright admit that Hannibal will not be his first Alpha causes a flicker of that itch behind his eyes that means his red is coming through.

"And where do you think the difference lies?" he asks instead.

Will hums. He tilts his head to one side as well, mirroring Hannibal's posture as he sits back, lax in his seat. "Fine food, finer company. Like dating, but much more permanent. There is a certain point of no return when it comes to courting."

"And that distresses you?"

"Shouldn't it?" Will asks. "We haven't known each other that long, Doctor Lecter. You say you want me, you say I interest you, but how long until the desire to knot me is sated and all that's left is who you are, and who I am? Will you find me so interesting then?"

"I cannot possibly predict that," Hannibal replies evenly. "I can only offer my assurances that my regard for you will not fade. Of this, I am absolutely certain. I do not offer my attention lightly."

"Nor do I," Will says. His eyes are sharp on Hannibal's face, meeting his gaze before his eyes drop, naturally unable to hold eye contact with an Alpha. He swallows harshly enough that his throat clicks and takes another sip of wine.

"Perhaps we should turn this into another of your games," Hannibal says. Will hums, his eyebrows rising. "You and I will take turns stating what we expect out of this relationship. If we disagree, we must come to a resolution before the next person takes their turn."

"And if we cannot agree?"

Hannibal smiles. "No relationship is perfect, Will," he murmurs. "But if we cannot agree, for the sake of this game, let's say this: if I say something you do not like, you get to ask me a question and I will answer it honestly. And the same in reverse."

"Tempting my desire to know you, and sating your need to know me," Will replies, his lips twitching in a knowing smile. "Clever, Doctor Lecter. But alright, I'll agree to it." He takes

another sip of wine and nods to Hannibal. "You start."

"The difference, as far as I know it, between courting an Omega and dating a woman, is the very fact that one instance is with an Omega, and the other is not. Omegas have evolved to be very defensive, and careful with their bodies and their bonds. So, there is a greater obstacle for the Alpha or woman trying to court them, because there is a greater threat."

Will hums, his eyes on his wine. "I agree," he murmurs. "Giving you a Voice, and letting you know what my heat smells like, and promising you a child, puts me at a much greater risk than my own Voice, and my own instincts, pose to you."

Hannibal tilts his head to one side. "Can you say that, when you have shown already what great power you hold over me?"

Will's eyes flash. "I only use that power because you have allowed me to," he says. "You could fight it, if you wanted to. You could cast me aside and tell me never to speak to you again and I would be wise to obey."

"Wise," Hannibal repeats. "But not compelled. I have no power to make you do anything. Nor do I have the desire to."

Will raises his eyes, briefly, as though trying to test the truth of Hannibal's words. Hannibal has no intention of deceiving Will in this moment – it is a knife-edged situation they stand upon, too easy to fall one way or the other and be sliced in two.

Then, he swallows. "I don't think that's true," he says. "I think you would love to have dominion over me."

Hannibal hums. "Agree to disagree," he says, but he's smiling as he takes a drink of wine.

Will's eyes flash. "I believe I get to ask a question, then," he says.

Hannibal nods.

Will shifts his weight, and sighs, looking down again. His fingers toy with the stem of his wine glass, slowly spinning it around and watching the wine within the bowl swirl. "What happens if I bear you a girl?" he asks. "Or an Alpha?"

"Then I would be a happy father to a female or an Alpha."

"Even with the contract?" Will asks.

"That particular caveat was unknown to me, before I read the final contract and signed it upon your verbal agreement with Bedelia," Hannibal replies. "And if you do agree to mate with me, you will be my partner, not just a surrogate bound by obligation. You may choose to bar me from your nest during your heat or allow me inside. And any child you bear me, regardless of sex or gender, would be welcome in my home."

Will's fingers curl and he lets out a breath, like he had hoped for that answer, but hadn't expected to hear it.

Hannibal smiles. "You seem disappointed," he says.

"Disappointed? No." Will shakes his head and huffs a self-deprecating laugh, his mouth twitching at the corners. "I'm starting to realize how passive you have been in this whole affair."

Hannibal tilts his head to one side and lets out a querying hum.

"It challenges everything I have seen about you," Will continues. He shifts his weight forward and leans his elbow on the table, his eyes on Hannibal's around his wine glass. "You are a conqueror, Doctor Lecter, and you like being in control. Why have you let yourself be confined and restrained like this? What changed?"

Hannibal smiles. "You know the answer."

"I would have you say it," Will replies sharply. Then, he meets Hannibal's eyes, and his irises are beautifully gold around the pupil, turning into icy blue at the edges. They're lovely and dark and Hannibal wants Will to look at him like this for the rest of his life. Then, Will licks his lips, and adds softly; "Please."

Hannibal's smile widens, and he lets out a soft purr, noting how Will's fingers curl and his next inhale is unsteady. He wonders if Will can feel his heat, crawling up the side of a cliff like a bandit, ready to steal into the King's home and slit his throat while he sleeps. He wonders if Will is still afraid, of all the power he holds. If he will still insist on wearing the mask and collar during his heat.

"You changed me, Will," Hannibal finally says, giving Will his small reward, and Will swallows and drops his gaze. "I entered into this arrangement to make Bedelia happy. I agreed to meet you because of Alana and Margot. But the second I met you, the second I heard your sharp tongue and saw you, I realized that whatever formed between us would be something of our own design." He sighs. "Since that revelation, I have found outsider influence to be…aggravating."

Will smirks. "Only aggravating when it challenges what you want," he replies gently. Hannibal nods, conceding that. "You have been very open and honest with me. I'm surprised."

"I believe we agreed to the truth, mere hours ago."

Will sighs, nodding. "The truth," he murmurs. He raises his eyes and tilts his head to one side, regarding Hannibal with that same sharp, assessing gaze. "If we do mate," he begins, and Hannibal likes the way he says 'If'. It is the same way Hannibal says it – a concession for the sake of politeness, but they both know the true word they should be using is 'When'. "Your secrets become mine, and mine become yours. Just as those you share with Doctor Du Maurier."

"Of course," Hannibal replies.

"I want to confess something to you," Will says. "And I have to know it will not leave this room."

"Never," Hannibal breathes, sitting forward. He sets his wine glass down and rests his forearms on the table, fingers laced. Will mimics him, holding his gaze steadily. "I would never betray you, Will."

Will watches him for another long moment, and then he bites his lip and shivers, looking down again. His hair falls forward in front of his eyes and he pushes it back, tries to tuck the snow-damp strands behind his ear. He runs a hand through his hair and his shoulders roll.

"I killed Mason Verger," he whispers.

Hannibal hums, tilting his head to one side. Will lifts his eyes again but he cannot hold Hannibal's gaze. He seems nervous, but not in the same way he had been in Hannibal's kitchen, before revealing his Voice. This is a different kind of uneasiness, the kind that comes from wanting to please, instead of fearing wrath.

"How?" Hannibal asks.

Will presses his lips together. "He found out what I'd done for Margot and Alana," he says. "He got half of it right. He thought Margot was pregnant and assumed I had been the one to make it happen." His mouth twitches. "Well, he thought I had slept with her. He didn't know it was Alana who was pregnant. He was angry. He tried to hurt me, so I pushed him into the eel tank in his bedroom and watched it devour him."

Hannibal hums. He had suspected that Alana and Margot had done something to Mason to get him out of the way. Will's involvement had apparently been much greater than he'd originally assumed.

"He hurt Margot," Will growls, baring his teeth in a brief snarl. He hasn't raised his eyes yet. "He would have found out about Alana too. I couldn't let that happen."

"So you defended yourself," Hannibal says. Will lets out his breath in a shaky exhale. "You defended your friends, and your son."

"Yes," Will hisses.

"How did that make you feel?" Hannibal asks.

Will lifts his head and meets Hannibal's eyes. He swallows and draws his hands back, curling his fingers around his wine glass. He tilts his head back, exposing his throat as he takes a long drink from it, until it is empty.

Hannibal stands and circles the table, taking his glass and pouring Will another. Will's hands are shaking, but he's not afraid. Like the aftereffects of a deep massage, the poisons in Will's muscles are being leached away with his confession. It will leave him sore and shaking, but ultimately more at ease. More in control.

Hannibal sets the glass and decanter down and takes his seat again.

"I liked it," Will confesses. "I liked watching him die. I liked watching him choke on his own blood."

"I'm curious as to your relationship with him," Hannibal says. "Margot told me you knew him as well as you knew her. And you used his blood for your Voice, until that supply obviously ran out." Will nods. "How did you know Mason?"

Will presses his lips together and shakes his head. "I knew him through Alana and Margot," he whispers. "I had been to their property several times. I think it was Mason's intention to try and breed me. I can't honestly be sure." He snarls again. "I think I was too old for his tastes, but I let him entertain the idea. I needed an excuse to be around Margot and Alana. I needed to protect them."

"So you used your neck, and your slick, to do this?"

"I never let him touch me," Will growls. "I just…let him think he might be able to."

"Did Mason know you were using his blood for a Voice?"

Will shakes his head. "Margot found his body. I was still there, kneeling by the tank and watching the eel devour him. We drained the tank and took what was left of his blood and that's when it all started."

"How much of this does Alana know?" Hannibal asks.

Will shrugs one shoulder. "I don't know what Margot has told her," he replies, and shakes his head again. "I don't think I could bear to see her face, if she found out I was the one that killed him. I think she thinks it was an accident. Self-defense, maybe."

Hannibal tilts his head to one side. "Was it self-defense, Will?" he murmurs.

Will manages a tight smile, and lifts his eyes to meet Hannibal's. "When no one is there to defend you, you must defend yourself," he says. "Margot said you told her that."

Hannibal smiles. "I also told her, if she wanted to kill her brother, to wait until she could get away with it." He pauses, and takes a sip of wine. "Or get someone to do it for her."

Will's eyes flash. "What a happy turn of events, then," he murmurs.

"Family is important to you," Hannibal says, and Will nods. "It is important to me, as well. My family is broken, much like yours, but the bonds we forge and the family we end up with isn't always the one bound by blood, or a shared home. We choose who we keep in our lives, and who we let go."

"And here you are, choosing me," Will says. Hannibal nods. Will licks his lips. "I wanted you to choose me."

Hannibal hums. "You seem to constantly swing between hostility and desperation, when it comes to my presence in your life," he says.

"I can't help how I feel," Will replies. "But I know it's you that causes it. It's complicated."

"You told me you hate how I make you feel," Hannibal says. Will nods. "Why?"

"I suppose, until I met you, I had never realized that there might be a chance I wouldn't be alone," Will whispers. "This is new territory for me, Doctor Lecter, and I have no map, and no guidance except the stars. But I feel like our stars are the same now, and that makes me uncomfortable."

"I will never force you this way or that," Hannibal replies. Will presses his lips together. "You are an agent of your own free Will, my dear. Do not think of me as a leader, with a collar and leash around your neck. I simply wish to follow you."

"Do not follow me," Will replies. "Walk beside me. As an equal."

Hannibal smiles. He finishes his wine and Will finishes his. He doesn't ask for more and Hannibal makes no room to fill his own glass.

Will sighs, and looks out to the window. The air feels strangely thick; anticipatory. "I am glad to be here with you, Hannibal," he whispers, and the soft way his lips and tongue forms Hannibal's name is like another drink of wine all its own, a rich bouquet Hannibal wants to savor for a thousand years.

"As am I," Hannibal replies. "I didn't see this coming. I didn't see you coming. But now that you are here, I cannot imagine being happy in any other way."

Will smiles, fond and adoring when he puts his eyes on Hannibal's again. He presses his lips together and swallows, one hand absently turning his empty glass. "If I stay the night," he murmurs, "will it be as a guest?"

"That is your decision," Hannibal replies.

Will hums. "Does your bed smell like your wife?" he asks.

Hannibal smiles, and shakes his head.

Will's eyes are dark, and he nods. Hannibal stands and Will follows suit and doesn't move when Hannibal circles the table again. He sets a hand on Will's shoulder and turns him, and Will lifts his gaze, one of his hands settling lightly on Hannibal's arm. His fingers curl in his sleeve.

Hannibal slides his other hand into Will's hair and draws him into a kiss. Will presses against his chest, his lips parting with a sweet moan as Hannibal kisses him. He tightens his hand in Will's hair and Will gasps, shivering as Hannibal holds his head and deepens the kiss. His other hand slides from Will's shoulder to the side of his neck, cupping his thrumming pulse. He smells so sweet up close, tastes like the fine food and wine Hannibal served him, and his warmth is a welcome feeling against Hannibal's chest through their clothes.

Hannibal feels almost rabid. He wants to throw Will down onto the table, spill the wine and soak him in it so Hannibal can lick it from his skin. He wants to mount Will right here, right

where Bedelia and Anthony sat. Wants the plates of their next meal to sit on stains of Will's seed and his slick.

Will shivers and pulls back, needing air. Hannibal growls softly, encouraging him not to move away, and Will doesn't. He stays close, his nails digging into Hannibal's arm, his other hand flat on Hannibal's hip and tugging them close.

"Take me upstairs," Will murmurs, and he's not using his Voice but the need Hannibal feels at the words are just as strong as if he had. Hannibal nods and guides Will by the neck out of the dining room, into the hallway. "Wait – wait. Fuck."

He stops, regarding Will curiously. Will's eyes are almost black, just a thin ring of gold around the wide pupil. His cheeks are flushed, and his lips are parted, dragging in deep lungful after lungful of Hannibal's scent.

"We need the mask and collar," he rasps.

Hannibal hums. "If that's what you want," he says. "I won't force you."

Will shakes his head. "I need them," he replies.

Hannibal presses his lips together, his fingers tightening around Will's neck until Will gasps, his eyes flashing. "You said you would let me bite you. That you wanted me to." Will swallows, nodding. "Are you now denying me that privilege?"

Will's mouth twitches, he bows his head and exposes his upper teeth and lets out a soft, plaintive whine. "I'm sorry," he says quietly. His fingers smooth out from Hannibal's arm, slide to his shoulder, track down his collarbone until they rest against his chest. They curl again. "No. I won't deny you. I'm sorry."

"I'm not going to hurt you," Hannibal murmurs, because it feels like Will needs to hear it. Indeed, Will shivers, like the words affect him as deeply as the emotion Hannibal feels when Will calls him by his first name. "I want to give you everything, Will. I can give you a Voice that is natural, so you do not need to rely on anyone else."

"Just you," Will murmurs, bitter except for the way he's smiling. He lifts his head and meets Hannibal's eyes. "If I agree, then you are agreeing as well; to sate all of my needs, just as I will sate yours. Perfect equals."

"That is all I want," Hannibal confesses. "All I've ever wanted. An equal."

Will's smile widens, and he leans in and kisses Hannibal, sweet and chaste. The scent of his slick is pervading the air, overwhelming everything else, just as the man himself does. Hannibal growls when Will pulls back, and Will takes both of his hands and leads him towards the stairs. Hannibal follows, and when they reach the top, he takes the lead and guides Will to his bedroom.

Compared to the rest of Hannibal's house, his room is relatively plain. He has heavy curtains blocking out the street lights from outside. The floors are a light wood set in cross-sectioning

spirals, with a thick cream patterned carpet separating the bed from the floor. His cabinetry and closet doors are darker wood, as is the frame of his bed, like the guest room furniture. His bedsheets, duvet, and pillows are a cool teal-blue color scheme, framed by two bedside tables with lamps on each, and art, and the large red plate above the headboard. At the foot of the bed, an ottoman, a small table, and two chairs form a miniature version of his psychiatric study. Hannibal realizes that the color scheme is absently catered to an Omega's – blue and gold are colors promoted to induce calm and peacefulness, and often Omega nests share that scheme. Omegas are naturally predisposed to water, and gold.

Will takes a look around, his smile soft and serene as he scents the air and looks over the table setting. He bites his lower lip and lets Hannibal go, walking to the end of the bed and resting his hand on the soft duvet. He curls his fingers in it and raises his eyes again.

Hannibal smiles at him, and Will smiles back. "I can get you some clothes to sleep in," he says. "And I have spare toiletries if you want to make use of the washroom."

Will bites his lower lip, humming. He sits on the end of the bed and holds his hands between his knees, his fingers loosely curling and uncurling around each other. "That'd be great," he murmurs.

Hannibal nods, and goes to the linen closet, leaving the door to the hallway open so Will can see him. He takes out a spare toothbrush and a set of towels, and returns to Will and sets them on the bed. Then he grabs a pair of lounge pants and a white t-shirt and sets them on top of the pile.

He closes the door to the hallway and gestures to the open door to his bedroom. "Make yourself comfortable," he says.

Will hums, and stands. He takes off his shoes and socks and belt and sets them under and on one of the chairs at the table, before taking his haul and going to the bathroom. He shuts the door and Hannibal busies himself with undressing. He takes off and folds his clothes and replaces them with sleepwear of his own, smiling to himself when he hears Will brushing his teeth, using the bathroom, and changing in the other room.

It's so delightfully domestic, and it's something Hannibal realizes that Bedelia has rarely done. Whenever she spends the night, she leaves in the same clothes she came in, often before the night is fully over. She has never brought clothes here, or set up a corner for herself in the bathroom. The only traces of her presence is a bottle of her perfume and a spare toothbrush just like Will's. Even when they were dating, she was never so comfortable as to wear Hannibal's clothes, or turn her back on him, or leave him unattended in a room for any length of time, except the kitchen.

In another world, Hannibal wonders if all of this would seem so novel, or if it simply delights him because it is Will doing it. He tries to imagine if he had mated with Anthony, or Adrian, if he would find such pleasure in something as simple as listening to them brushing their teeth. He finds it almost impossible to do so.

Then, the water stops, and the door opens. Will carries out his clothes and sets them on the same chair as his belt. Hannibal's shirt is loose on him around the shoulders and chest,

revealing the lovely arch of his neck and exposing the center of his collarbones. His face is damp, the ends of his hair wet like he splashed them with water, and his eyes are bright, his shoulders lax and comfortable. Clearly he feels safe and sure in Hannibal's presence, with the promise of Hannibal's touch lingering like a scent in the air. Bedelia has never been comfortable being so exposed.

Will straightens, and regards him, and Hannibal smiles. Will tilts his head to one side and approaches him, his lips parting as he scents the air. "You smell happy," he says, one hand touching Hannibal's chest. He sounds surprised.

"I am," Hannibal replies. Simply. Openly.

Will bites his lower lip, his eyelids fluttering when Hannibal puts a hand in his damp hair and tightens his knuckles. "I want to make you happy," he whispers, like the confession had been dragged out of him.

"Oh, my darling Will," Hannibal says, and leans down to kiss him. He cups Will's face with his other hand and adores the way Will shivers, arching against him like he can't get close enough. "You already do." Will trembles again, a whimper stuck in his throat. He's purring and Hannibal loves the sound of it. "Come here."

Will follows when Hannibal leads him to the side of the bed. He reaches out to tug the sheets and duvet back, and then he pushes Will down onto it and Will sits, and crawls back when Hannibal prowls over him. Hannibal thinks of the time they played in Will's house, with Will so brazen and dark underneath him. This time, there are no witnesses, nothing holding them back from doing what they both desire, and they can speak freely.

Will lets out a quiet, needy sound, raking his nails down Hannibal's chest, his legs spreading to allow Hannibal's weight to settle between his thighs as Hannibal covers him and kisses him again. He uses his hands to block Will's sight lines and grinds his erection between Will's legs, growling when he feels how hard Will is already. He can smell Will's slick, he wants to bare Will's skin and drink every flavor his body can provide.

He drags one hand down Will's body, rakes his nails across Will's flanks through his shirt, and cups the back of his thigh, forcing him to curl up tighter under Hannibal, to submit to his weight and his strength and Will obeys eagerly. His hands are gentle on Hannibal's shoulders, as submissive and sweet as the finest of his breed.

Hannibal rears back with another growl. His mouth is tender from Will's kisses, and his stomach is burning with desire. His eyes and his head feel hot and he feels the strange compulsion to bury his face in Will's hair, or his neck, to seek coolness on his skin even though Will is turning fever-warm under him, desperate and ready.

He tucks his fingers under Will's shirt and yanks it up, exposing his stomach, then his chest, and Will sits up and allows Hannibal to pull the shirt over his head and throw it to the ground behind him. Will's chest bears a fine flush, and Hannibal wants to suck darker marks onto him.

He realizes, abruptly, that he *can*. Bedelia is not here to warn him to control his teeth, and Will wants it. He wants Hannibal's bite, wants his marks, wants his knot. Hannibal can see it in Will's eyes.

Will bites his lower lip. He puts a hand in Hannibal's hair and leans up to kiss him, pulling them together. Then, he draws back, and lets out a quiet, desperate nose. His eyes close and he tilts his head to one side, guiding Hannibal's mouth there.

Hannibal growls, shoving Will back, and opens his mouth wide to suck a dark mark onto Will's skin. Will trembles, moaning beneath him, his hands digging into Hannibal's flanks and his thighs going tight around his waist as Hannibal sucks. It's loud, messy, and Hannibal knows there will be a very dark mark there by the time he's done.

Will cries out when he pulls back, licking over the tender mark. He trembles and gasps, his eyes opening wide. "Please," he whispers, low and needy.

Hannibal smiles, petting through his hair. "Patience, darling," he murmurs. "This is the first time I have been allowed to enjoy you, with no audience or deadlines."

"You would enjoy me whether there was an audience or not," Will replies, unsteadily. "Don't be selfish, Doctor Lecter."

Hannibal huffs a laugh. "But I am selfish," he says, and punctuates the words with a kiss. First to Will's mouth, then his jaw. "And sadistic." He kisses Will's neck, where the bruise is already starting to turn red. It will darken to purple and black if Hannibal has his way. "And cruel. All words you gave to me."

Will smiles. "Do you look at me as one of your fine meals?" he asks.

"I look at you as mine," Hannibal replies.

Will sucks in a sharp breath, his fingers shaking as they settle on Hannibal's shoulders again. "Hannibal," he whispers, and Hannibal trembles, closing his eyes and resting his forehead against Will's. "Be kind."

And Hannibal wants to be. But he senses this is another challenge – would it be kinder to be rough with Will, to sate the desperate needs clawing at both of them and give into all the dark desires they both so clearly want? Or should he be gentle, and treat Will like a mate he would never be rough with, and lay with Will like he would lay with Bedelia so that Will felt safe with Hannibal, and trusted that Hannibal would never abuse him?

But Will has a Voice, and if Hannibal goes too far, he will use it and force Hannibal to stop. Hannibal opens his eyes and cups Will's cheek. "Promise me something," he says, and Will's eyes flash and he hums, leaning up for a kiss that Hannibal answers. It's chaste but passionate and Hannibal finds himself momentarily forgetting what he was going to say.

He pulls back, gasps, and clenches his jaw so that he can force himself to maintain control, however tenuous a hold it is. "If I do something you don't like, you must tell me," he says.

Will smiles, wide and sharp. "If your tongue offends me, I will cut it out and throw it away," he purrs. Hannibal smiles back. "If your hands offend me, I will cut them off and throw them away."

He laughs, and kisses Will again. "If you had not been so secretive with how to please you, I wouldn't need to worry," he says, teasing and soft. He runs his hands down Will's flanks and finds the edge of the lounge pants Hannibal gave him. Will lifts his hips, eager to be bare and open for Hannibal's touch. Hannibal tugs them down to expose his cock, the tops of his thighs. He rears back so he can pull them all the way off, freeing one of Will's feet, then the other, and tossing the clothing to one side.

"Maybe I like it when you worry," Will replies. He's bare and open for Hannibal's ravenous gaze. Hannibal has yet to see him so exposed, and his teeth itch to bury themselves in every part of Will he sees. He wants to raise red lines in Will's stomach, he wants to put his mouth to the pale innards of Will's thighs. He's so Goddamn beautiful, he looks good enough to devour raw, and Hannibal wants to.

Hannibal smiles, and leans down for another kiss. Will's nails rake down his back and Hannibal growls against his mouth and nips his lower lip. Without his clothes, Will's heat and scent leap up into Hannibal, soak him right to the bone.

"Roll onto your side, darling," Hannibal commands, and Will whimpers and obeys. Hannibal lays out behind him and gathers Will in his arms, Will's back to his chest. Will's slick is staining his thighs, leaking steadily from him, and Hannibal sucks in a deep breath, his nose at Will's nape, one arm wrapped around his stomach and the other pillowing his head.

He puts his hand over Will's eyes and Will gasps. Hannibal digs his free hand into Will's hip, wraps his fingers around the jut of his hipbone, and grinds his erection against Will's ass just to hear Will whimper for him again.

"Oh, *God*," Will gasps, whining when Hannibal wraps his hand around Will's cock, stroking him slowly as Will shudders in his arms. He reaches back to fist a hand in Hannibal's clothes around his thigh, and lifts one leg to expose himself to Hannibal. The scent of him is maddening, stronger than Hannibal has smelled before since his skin is exposed. Hannibal's mouth is dry and his head feels too hot.

He buries his nose against Will's neck and opens his mouth wide to suck another dark mark onto his nape. This is where Omegas are most sensitive, and he feels how Will tenses up, his cock twitching in Hannibal's grip. Will moans, desperate and raw.

"I feel as though every part of you is calling out to me," Hannibal growls. Will shivers, arching back against him as Hannibal tightens his grip and twist his hand at the head of Will's cock. "I could hunt you, blind, in the dark, with only your scent to guide me."

Will gasps. He tilts his head forward to expose the back of his neck and Hannibal nips at the skin around the tendon there, pleased when Will shivers again. "Please," he whispers. "Hannibal, *please*."

"What do you want, Will?" Hannibal murmurs.

"I want everything," Will replies unsteadily. "Mount me. Knot me. Breed me. *Please*."

And oh, how Hannibal wants to. He releases Will's eyes and takes him by the hips. "On your stomach, darling," he whispers, and Will rolls onto his stomach with another desperate, ready noise. He spreads his knees to give Hannibal room and Hannibal covers him, pressing him down with his weight. His skin feels too warm and he rears up, pulling his shirt over his head and tossing it to one side. Will tilts his head, the corner of his eye and the red flush on his cheek visible to Hannibal now.

Hannibal leans down, one hand in Will's hair, and kisses him passionately. Will moans, bracing himself on his elbows and knees so that his bare ass rubs against Hannibal's cock through his clothes. Hannibal growls when he does it, biting Will's lower lip sharp enough that he knows it hurts, but Will doesn't flinch away from him. He whimpers, and parts his jaws for Hannibal's tongue, drinks in Hannibal's rough growl and answers with a whine of his own.

Hannibal rakes his nails down Will's exposed flanks and forces him to spread his knees out wider, so that he's lower to the bed. His hand flattens on Will's ass and he drags his thumb between Will's legs, gathering up a thick layer of his slick. His thumb finds Will's hole, burning hot and wet as a woman, and he presses against the tight muscle, shuddering when Will opens for him readily.

Will moans, loudly, breaking the kiss and dropping his forehead to the mattress, his fingers curling tight in the sheet. "Deeper," he demands, and Hannibal obliges him, pulling him thumb back and sinking in with his forefinger instead. Will shudders, his shoulders flexing and going tense, his spine dipping down in a lovely arch. "Yes, *yes*, Hannibal – *please*."

Hannibal smiles, and bites down on Will's neck, hobbling him at the scruff as he sinks his finger all the way inside. Will is tight and hot and so, so wet, it's maddening. Hannibal knows Omegas are specifically evolved to take and hold a knot – no matter how loose and wet Hannibal gets Will, Will's body will cradle his knot fiercely, possessively, until every last drop of Hannibal's seed is spent.

He growls and adds a second finder, stretching him out as much as his rapidly thinning patience will allow. Will howls, lifting his neck into Hannibal's mouth, arching his hips against Hannibal like he can go deeper. Hannibal curls his fingers down, finding the rough bundle of nerves inside of Will that will send him flying.

Will flinches, gasping when he brushes his fingers along Will's prostate. His scent is absolutely solid with pleasure, drowning Hannibal's lungs, and his knuckles are white in the sheets. Hannibal touches him there again and Will's chest rumbles with a growl and purr wrapped into one.

"Please," Will begs again, one last, desperate time. "Alpha -."

Hannibal growls. A warning.

Will immediately corrects himself; "*Hannibal*," he gasps, and his cry is no less commanding for how soft and threaded with need it is. "Mount me. Give me everything."

Hannibal pulls his fingers out and shoves his lounge pants down to his knees. He flattens his slick fingers over Will's hip and tightens his grip. "Stay still for me, darling," he murmurs, and Will whimpers, going tense. Ready. He nods.

Hannibal closes his eyes, flattening his body over Will's back. His cockhead drags through the slick between Will's legs and Will moans, dropping his shoulders, taking the form of the mounting position so that Hannibal's cock can penetrate as deeply as he can. Will isn't in heat yet, his body isn't fertile, but every instinct in him is screaming to submit to Hannibal and accept his seed. His body wants to grow heavy and rich with Hannibal's child. Hannibal can smell how badly he wants it.

He kisses the back of Will's neck, and lets go of Will's hair so that he can take a hold of his cock, and press the head against Will's slick hole. He shudders, growling low, and pushes inside.

Will moans. His body trembles and Hannibal has to grab him tightly as he writhes and arches, his orgasm slamming through him. Hannibal smells Will's seed as it spills onto the bed, feels Will's body spasm and tighten around him. It feels so incredibly good, warmer than any burn of alcohol, better than any food Hannibal could possibly make. It's more satisfying than a kill, wilder than a hunt. He has caught Will, and it feels like this chase has lasted for a thousand years, and it's finally here, and Hannibal feels almost high with the victory of it all.

He couldn't stop himself if he wanted to. He bares his teeth against Will's neck, fits them into either side of Will's sweaty, flexing tendon, and bites down hard enough to break skin. Will's cry of agonized pleasure sounds like a symphony all its own, the most beautiful melody Hannibal has ever heard. He wants to hear it every day for the rest of time.

He fucks deep into Will, pulls back and thrusts in again. Will meets him, the sounds of their skin and flesh colliding creating a low harmony to every cry and gasp Hannibal drives from Will's lungs. Will's pleasure-soaked blood is sweet on his tongue, his teeth no longer itch, sated by the taste and heat of him.

Hannibal closes his eyes, digs both hands into Will's hips, and mounts him brutally. He takes his teeth out of Will's skin, mindful of causing too much harm, and licks the stain of blood from Will's neck. Will trembles, sweaty and fine but solid under him, graciously bearing his weight and accepting Hannibal's ownership of him, his conquering of this new soil.

Hannibal snarls when Will goes abruptly lax, bearing his weight. He lets go with one hand and slams his palm against the mattress, next to one of Will's wrists, and forces Will to accept his heat and weight as he thrusts into Will. His mind roars with dominance every time he forces Will's flesh to part for him, he snarls whenever he forces himself to pull back. It feels wild, unruly and unrefined, and they are storming the beaches, slaughtering the prisoners of war. The fields Hannibal will sow are soaked in blood and the air is filled with the scent of Will's need, his desire answering in kind. The conqueror and his consort, where both of them could claim either title.

Will wraps his fingers around Hannibal's wrist, his other hand reaching back and fisting tightly in Hannibal's sweaty hair. Hannibal rises up onto the balls of his feet, forcing himself as deeply and brutally into Will as he can.

"Please," Will moans, weak and fractured at the base of his neck. Hannibal feels Will's body tense up and spasm around him whenever he moves just right. He could bring Will to orgasm again, and he wants to. He wants to ruin Will, destroy him with pleasure, rip him to shreds with his love. He snarls and lets go of Will's hip, reaching under him to wrap his fingers around Will's slick cock.

Will lets out another high-pitched, desperate sound, shivering under Hannibal. His eyes close and he gasps, red mouth parted, the flush of arousal spreading down his back now under Hannibal's heat. "*Fuck*," Will hisses, his thighs shaking and tensed. He stretches out his free hand, braces himself against the headboard so he can push back into Hannibal's thrusts.

"Tell me what you need," Hannibal growls, at once wholly staggered and completely unsurprised at how wrecked his own voice sounds.

"Bite me again," Will demands, and Hannibal obliges him instantly even though there was no Voice to compel him. How strange that Will's needs and desires are things he is so eager to sate.

He bites Will at the shoulder, splitting his skin apart, his canines shredding Will's flesh and his mouth filling with blood. Will whimpers, his stomach tensing and his shoulders going tight and Hannibal feels him bearing down again, so tight and hot and wet, Hannibal feels like he'll lose his damn mind if he doesn't knot Will soon.

He gathers up Will's release on his fingers and holds them to Will's mouth and Will sucks them down like he did yesterday, drinking down whatever Hannibal offers him with a needy moan. Hannibal knows Will can taste his own slick, his seed, his sweat.

Hannibal wants him to taste his blood, too.

He pulls out, the startled and angry growl Will lets out mirrored in his own lizard brain. He takes Will by the hips and throws him onto his back without asking, covering Will again and sinking back into him before Will can get his bearings.

His mouth is full of Will's blood and he kisses Will, his dirty hand on Will's throat as Will parts his lips and accepts Hannibal's kiss. Will moans, digging his nails into Hannibal's back, wrapping his legs around Hannibal's waist.

"Do it," Will growls, his eyes a blisteringly beautiful gold when Hannibal rests their foreheads together. There's a smear of red on Will's mouth and Hannibal loves the color of it. He imagines Will covered in blood, bathed in one of Hannibal's kills. He imagines taking Will hunting, side-by-side as equals, and drenching his mate in the same victory that Hannibal feels in this moment.

A victory they share.

Hannibal smiles, kissing Will again. "You want my knot?" he asks, and Will snarls, nodding. Hannibal growls when Will nips his lower lip and he fits his free hand under Will's knee, forcing him to curl up even more. "My beautiful, darling boy."

"Make me yours," Will demands.

Hannibal growls, and lowers his mouth to Will's neck, sucking another dark bruise just above the first. Will shivers, wrapping his arms around Hannibal's shoulders, and lets out a high-pitched, wrecked sound when Hannibal starts to slow. The desire to knot is like an itch at the base of his spine, demanding he sink deeper, soak himself in Will's slick. His instincts seek out the clench of Will's body, command him to fill his mouth with Will's blood and his nose with Will's scent, as his knot fills Will in turn.

He goes still, as deep into Will as he can go, and bares his teeth, sinking down with them as he feels his knot start to swell. Will shudders, scent sharp with pain that isn't overtaken by an orgasm, pain that he feels as Hannibal bites him. So long having to keep himself restrained, Hannibal knows he has lost much of his control now, and bitten Will far more than custom dictates he should.

He doesn't care. He wants to taste everything Will has to offer.

He swallows a mouthful of Will's blood, and licks over the wound, shuddering as his knot seals itself in Will's body and he feels his orgasm wash over him. It's powerful and heady like a sweet, rich wine. Will's mint and lemongrass scent is coated with sugar, and Hannibal gasps when he feels Will start to purr.

They're sweaty and bloody and disgusting and Hannibal has never felt so new in all his life.

He pulls away from Will's neck and kisses him, gasping when Will's body clenches up, coaxing another load out of his cock as his spine trembles and his gut clenches. It feels like it will never end, that he will pour everything of himself into Will like iron in a mold and build their legacy in the form of a conqueror's monument.

Will lets out a shaky laugh, his eyes bright, flushed and beautiful under Hannibal. Hannibal smiles, overjoyed at the look of pleasure and satisfaction on Will's face.

Will reaches up and touches his cheek and Hannibal turns into Will's palm, nuzzling his bare wrist gently when Will's fingers curl. "No going back, now," he murmurs.

And that is true. Now that Hannibal has bitten Will, he will gain his own Voice, and the beginnings of their pair bond will start to form. But the foundation is solid, of that he has no doubt. "I have no intention of retreating," he murmurs, and Will's smile widens.

Hannibal leans down and kisses Will again, pleased at the quiet, sated moan Will stifles against his lips. "All of Rome awaits us," Will says.

Hannibal laughs, petting a hand through Will's sweaty hair, and kisses his forehead. Will hums and tucks his nose under Hannibal's jaw, his body going lax while they wait out Hannibal's knot so that they can separate. Although Hannibal has no intention of parting from Will at all tonight. It would please him immensely to have Will in his bed, sweet and slick and wanting, until they are both too spent to continue and fall into restful sleep.

"I feel I must apologize," Hannibal says. "I have robbed you of the full courting experience."

Will huffs a laugh. "You have been courting me all along, Doctor Lecter," he replies, soft and affectionate. "Despite my resistance. Despite that aggravating outsider influence, you have prevailed. Congratulations."

Hannibal smiles. He leans down to kiss Will again and Will hums into it, as sweet and wanting as he has always been.

Will shivers, biting his lower lip as Hannibal's knot deflates and he can pull out. There is a stain between Will's legs on the bed, slick and seed leaking out of him with Hannibal's knot no longer there to keep it inside of him. Will whines, and reaches for Hannibal again, pulling him close and rolling them so that he's sitting in Hannibal's lap.

Hannibal cradles Will close, accepting his next kiss, then another, until they are too breathless to continue. Will rests their foreheads together, his hands in Hannibal's hair, and he shivers. But not from cold.

"I want you to mount me again," he whispers, like it's the most sinful of any confession. Hannibal swallows, his gut clenching with something like hunger, but only a hunger Will can satisfy. His head is starting to feel warm again.

"The spirit is willing," Hannibal says with a smile, "but the flesh needs a few minutes. You're not in heat yet, my dear."

Will smiles, tilting his head to one side. "Well," he purrs, and slides down Hannibal's body until he's kneeling between Hannibal's feet, his mouth at Hannibal's cock. "Let's see if I can provide some incentive."

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

kind of a short chapter, but I hope you guys like it!

Hannibal wakes up coughing. He rises from a bed warm and stinking of Will's slick, and goes to his bathroom. He fills a glass with water and drinks it all, clearing his throat after the fact. His throat feels thick and strained, like the onset of a fever or cold is coming to him. It's distressing, and he clears his throat again and fills the glass a second time.

He becomes aware of Will's heat by his side and raises his eyes to see Will regarding him in the mirror. "It'll wear off," he murmurs.

Hannibal raises his eyebrows, and Will smiles. "It's your Voice, Doctor Lecter," he murmurs. "Surely you knew this would happen."

Hannibal hums, setting the glass down. He regards himself in the mirror, then Will. Will's throat and exposed chest are a mesh of patchwork marks, lines from Hannibal's nails, deep suck-bruises from his mouth. And, of course, the bite marks on his neck, standing out dark and brash against his pale skin.

He looks absolutely ruined, and Hannibal purrs.

Will smiles and rests his cheek on Hannibal's bare shoulder. "Would you like to try using it?" he asks. "The change happens more quickly when put to use."

"I'm not sure how," Hannibal rasps, his voice low and hoarse. His throat feels itchy, the same way his teeth do when he gets the urge to bite Will.

Will hums, his eyes heavy-lidded and a beautiful mix of gold and green. He steps behind Hannibal and rests his hands on Hannibal's hips, right above where his lounge pants sit. "It feels like desperation," Will whispers, and Hannibal shivers at the warmth of Will's breath against his neck. Alphas are instinctively defensive at a mouth on their neck, evolved to think of it as a predator or a threat. "Think of something you have to have, something that you will do whatever is necessary to attain, or accomplish."

He pauses, and kisses Hannibal's shoulder lightly. "I don't want to use my Voice on you, Will," Hannibal murmurs.

Will huffs a laugh. "What if I ran from you?" he says, and Hannibal goes tense. "I could go in your room, grab my clothes, and bolt for the door. Would you chase me?"

Hannibal swallows, his fingers clenching against the sink edge. "Yes," he says. He can see Will's eyes over his shoulder, half-lidded, dark on his face.

Will's smile widens, grows sharp, shows his teeth. "Would you command me to stop?" he asks. "Compel me to return to your bed?"

Hannibal hesitates. He wants to say that he wouldn't, but he also does not want to lie. "I don't want to force you to do anything you wouldn't want," he replies.

Will nods, pressing his lips together. He turns Hannibal and presses close to him, putting his hands on Hannibal's bared chest. He leans in, and Hannibal takes him by the hair, ready to tighten his hands on Will's flesh and kiss him, get him slick and wanting. Will's heat-scent is stronger today, just teasing on the edges of the horizon like dawn, tinting the air pink and orange.

Will stops, resists right before their lips touch. "I want to kiss you," he whispers, fever-warm against Hannibal's chest. "Tell me to kiss you."

Hannibal growls. "Kiss me," he demands.

Will's eyes flash, and he smiles. "Like you mean it, Doctor Lecter," he replies, his voice a low purr.

Hannibal snarls again, a sharp heat rising behind his eyes. He takes Will and turns them, shoving Will up onto the bathroom counter. Will gasps, spreading his legs for Hannibal to stand between. He's still naked, his skin flushed and dirty with seed, sweat, and slick. Hannibal puts his free hand on Will's chest and feels his heartbeat pounding.

"Kiss me," he says again, rougher this time.

Will smirks and puts a hand over Hannibal's mouth. "No," he says, sharply. Challenging.

Hannibal bares his teeth, and Will's smile widens. He cups Hannibal's jaw, his thumb on Hannibal's lower lip, and Hannibal kisses the pad of his thumb, his hands falling to Will's bare thighs and pulling him closer. "If you want to me to kiss you, you must command me to do it," Will murmurs.

"You're a stubborn thing," Hannibal says, fond but frustrated as well. He loves the sounds he can pull from Will with just a kiss, delights in the taste of him and the sweetness of his mouth. His nails dig into Will's thighs and Will presses his lips together, shivering.

"Maybe I just like providing incentive," he replies, one eyebrow arching.

Hannibal smiles. "I can provide incentive, too," he says, and Will tilts his head to one side, letting out a pleased purr. "I can make you beg."

Will's eyes flash, and his smile widens. He lifts his chin in a show of challenge and Hannibal growls. He wants to lean in and kiss Will, but of course, that's part of the game. He cannot show weakness now. He gentles his hands and slides them up Will's thighs, smirking when Will goes tense and sucks in a shaky breath. He's hardening, cheeks dark with anticipation.

Hannibal lets out a soft growl just to see Will's gut clench up, and then he drops to his knees.

"Ah – *shit*," Will snarls, one hand flying out for purchase, knocking over the cup of toothbrushes and the bottle of Bedelia's perfume. It doesn't fall, but rolls to the corner, and Will's other hand slides to Hannibal's hair as Hannibal forces his thighs apart and licks over Will's hole, where he's dirty with seed and slick.

Will's scent is strong here, the heat forming in his chest bleeding out through his skin, and Hannibal forces his tongue into Will's heat, he's loose and slick enough for Hannibal to do it. Will's thighs tremble under his hands and Will lets out a sharp, high-pitched sound of pleasure as Hannibal licks at him, drinks the new slick Will's body is producing. It's sweet and thick, the mint of his scent jellied for Hannibal's consumption.

Hannibal smiles at Will's desperate moan, nuzzling the soft, warm skin of his perineum. He presses behind Will's balls, lifting them out of the way and putting pressure on his prostate from the outside. Will trembles, his thighs wanting to close, but they can't, forced apart by Hannibal's shoulders and his free hand.

Hannibal opens his mouth wide on Will's hole, slides his tongue inside, and nips his rim, and Will cries out loudly. Hannibal hears his head knocking back against the mirror. Will is shaking, his scent thick with pleasure, his hand getting tighter and tighter in Hannibal's hair like he can't control himself.

Hannibal pulls back and lets go of Will's ass, sliding his finger across his slick hole instead. He's wet and red here, sore from taking Hannibal's knot multiple times last night, but his body parts as eagerly as ever when Hannibal slides one of his fingers deep into Will.

He snarls, presses his nose against the tendon that connects Will's thigh to his pelvis, and bites down on it where he's most delicate and fragile. Will whimpers, loud and needy as Hannibal sucks the skin between his teeth, works his tongue over the soft flesh.

"*Hannibal*," Will gasps, and Hannibal raises his eyes to see Will's head tilted back, his jaw slack, eyes tight with rapture. Will's free hand drops to his cock and strokes slowly, hard and red in his white-knuckled grip.

Hannibal growls and stands, yanking Will from the counter. He pulls his finger out of Will and wraps his hand in Will's hair, hauling him caveman-like to the bed. It's rude, discourteous, downright unevolved, but that's what Will conjures in him.

Will staggers and falls to his knees on the bed and Hannibal forces him to bend over the bed and pulls his legs back so Will is standing, bent over and bare for Hannibal again. Hannibal slides two fingers into Will's slick hole and puts his other hand on Will's sore nape. His bite mark is hot and tender under his hand and Will whimpers, trembling.

Hannibal covers him, driving his fingers in deep just to hear Will gasp. "Do you yield?" he growls, and Will shivers, shoulders rolling, and shakes his head.

"Would you?" he murmurs.

Hannibal smiles, and pulls his fingers out. "No," he replies, and pushes his lounge pants down to free his cock. Will whines, arching his back to encourage Hannibal to penetrate him, to sink into him and split him apart on Hannibal's knot.

Hannibal growls, and grabs a tight hold of Will's hips, rolling him onto his back on the edge of the bed. Hannibal takes a hold of his cock, shuddering in pleasure, and presses the head against Will's hole. Will whimpers when he doesn't push in right away.

He reaches up, resting his hands on Hannibal's chest. His eyes are dark, his red lips parted, panting with need.

"Let me kiss you," Hannibal whispers, "and I'll give you what you need."

Will whines, his eyes shining and wide. So beautiful, Hannibal can hardly bear to look at him. Finally, Will relents, too desperate to deny them both any longer. "Please," he whispers, and pushes himself up onto one elbow, his other hand cupping Hannibal's jaw. "Kiss me."

Hannibal falls against him, roughly taking Will by the neck and hauling him into a kiss. He growls against it, and bites Will's lower lip when Will gasps. It feels like he's won, but Hannibal knows it's never that simple. Even in his surrender, Will is in control.

He pushes into Will, shuddering at the feeling of Will's hot, slick body parting for him. Will tenses up, his thighs wrapped tight around Hannibal's waist, and he moans loudly, his body twitching like he wants to fall back and let Hannibal mount him, but he can't bear to part any further from him. It's a decadent push and pull, warring desires in his head, and if there exists a more perfect metaphor for them, Hannibal has never heard of it.

Hannibal takes Will's wrists and forces them against the bed, pushing Will onto his back. He widens his stance and builds up a brutal rhythm inside Will's body, coaxing more desperate cries and rough moans from Will between kisses. Will's fingers curl, resistant for how badly he wants to touch Hannibal.

Hannibal pulls from his mouth and kisses his red chest, sucks another brazen, dark mark below Will's collarbone, and Will whimpers. "I want you to bite me again," he says, and Hannibal raises his eyes.

"You want me to hurt you?" he asks.

"It doesn't hurt," Will replies, and Hannibal knows he doesn't mean that. Shedding blood and breaking skin isn't done lightly. Will swallows, and licks his lips. "I like it."

Hannibal growls. He presses his nose to Will's pink neck, lets go of one wrist and puts it on Will's hip, his other hand forcing Will's arm above his head. Will's free arm wraps around his shoulders, holding him tightly.

"Bare your neck," Hannibal whispers, and Will obeys, tilting his head to one side and burying his face in his bicep. This side of his neck is completely unmarked, and in that moment Hannibal has never found something so offensive, so unforgivable.

Will lets out a desperate, low noise, fingers of his free hand curling in Hannibal's hair. "Please," he begs quietly, thick with adoration. "Mark me. Bite me."

Hannibal wants to, *God*, how he wants to. He tightens his hand on Will's wrist, digs his nails in, and opens his mouth wide on Will's sweaty neck as he fucks in deep. Will tenses when Hannibal's canines dig into his neck and he moans, shuddering. Hannibal feels Will spilling between their tightly-pressed stomachs, and it's so decadent, knowing Will is getting off just on the feel of Hannibal's teeth in his neck and his weight pressing Will down.

He can't deny his lovely mate any longer. Hannibal licks over the bruise he left and leans back, flattening his hands on Will's hips and holding him still as he thrusts into Will as deeply as he can. His jaw clenches and his mouth is dry, he lets out a low snarl as his knot swells up and locks them together. Will is shaking, every part of his body creating a cacophony of sound and sensation as Hannibal releases inside of him.

When Hannibal recovers, he opens his eyes and sees Will staring up at him with nothing short of adoration. Hannibal leans down, releases Will's hips and pets through his hair instead, and cups the back of Will's neck, lifting him to a kiss.

Will moans quietly, his eyelids fluttering shut as he submits to Hannibal's kisses. Hannibal cups his thighs, toes off his lounge pants, and pushes them both up onto the bed, so they can lay flat while they wait out his knot. Will starts to purr, running gentle hands down Hannibal's bared back.

Hannibal answers with a rumble of his own, and finally releases Will's mouth when he needs the air. He rests their foreheads together, strangely reluctant to pull back any farther. Every inch of his skin is warm, begging to be soothed by Will's hands and his mouth and his scent. Hannibal doesn't know if this is a symptom of a pair bond forming, or his Voice growing, or something that is uniquely Will, but it's startling in its strength and Hannibal knows he could very easily drown, if he let the current take him.

He shudders as his cock twitches, releasing another load of his seed inside of Will. He wishes Will were fertile now, it feels like a waste except for the fact that lying with Will is so supremely satisfying. Hannibal would happily mount him barren, just to be with him like this after the fact.

Will goes tense when the sound of his phone ringing shatters the silent, intimate moment. "Shit," he mutters, lifting his head. "That's Jack's ringtone."

"It can wait," Hannibal replies.

Will huffs. "It'll have to," he says, and clenches up around Hannibal's knot to prove his point. Hannibal growls, his hips twitching with the intense need to rut against Will, get deeper inside of him and spill into his fertile body.

Hannibal smiles, lifting his head to see Will's eyes. "I could carry you," he says.

Will's eyes flash, equal parts amusement and arousal at the idea. "No," he replies, smiling. "I'm feeling lazy."

"And I'm feeling indulgent," Hannibal says.

Will huffs. "I should leave soon, though," he says, petting through Hannibal's hair. It's an appeasing gesture, but not one made out of fear. "I need to take care of the dogs, and if Jack needs me…"

"You cannot possibly want to drive to Wolf Trap and back," Hannibal says, frowning.

Will bites his lower lip and lifts one shoulder in a shrug. "I do it every day," he replies.

Hannibal swallows. His knot goes down and he pulls out, shivering at the feeling of Will's slick and his seed following him. He feels the overwhelming urge to purchase a toy that will keep it all inside of Will. But that draws some line he's not sure he should name. And Will can't get pregnant yet.

Will sits up, regarding Hannibal as he settles against the headboard. He cocks his head to one side. "You want to argue with me," he says.

Hannibal presses his lips together, looking down at their feet. "Yes," he admits. But he isn't sure if he simply wants to stay by Will's side, or if there is some other motivation that is roaring at him to keep Will in his bed. Will has animals he must attend to, and a job he must be present at. Hannibal has no right or reason to protest.

Will hums, and heaves a breath. "Let me guess," he begins. "You are worried about me driving in the snow, an hour and half each way and that's if traffic is kind to me. You want to suggest you come with me, but that's impractical if I need to go to a crime scene. Unless you accompany me there, too, where everyone will smell you on me and see the marks on my neck. Doctor Du Maurier said she would be here this morning, so you have to be here as well because despite the fact that she agreed to allow what we just did to happen, she's still not going to be happy about it. So you must be apart from me, when every instinct in you is fighting against it."

Hannibal blinks at him, and Will smiles. "That sound about right?"

Hannibal huffs, and allows himself a small smile. "That sums it up quite well, yes," he says. Then, he sighs. "Bedelia agreed to this, though. As far as I'm concerned, she has neither the legal nor moral grounds to argue with what happened."

"Emotions are powerful things, Doctor Lecter," Will replies. "Sometimes it's not always about what's legal, or moral." Then, he pauses, and heaves a large breath. "She's sleeping with Anthony," he says, and Hannibal nods. "One might argue she never had the legal or moral high ground. I can't help wonder why you let it go on for this long."

"Again, you cite my passivity," Hannibal says, smiling. He reaches out and rubs a hand up and down Will's back, because it feels right to do it and he loves how warm Will is under his touch. "I believe that there are a lot of concessions that can be made for the greater good. For a long time, Bedelia's happiness was my priority."

Will presses his lips together, like he wants to say something, but holds himself back. He lifts his head and rubs at the sore-looking teeth marks Hannibal just placed to his neck. "Doctor Lecter, let us be honest with each other," he says, and meets Hannibal's eyes. Hannibal nods, sitting forward so their postures are mirrored. "By this time next month I could have your child in my belly." Hannibal swallows back his purr, but he must not do a very good job of it, because Will's mouth twitches in a smile. "If you want me by your side, you need only ask."

Hannibal hums. "Will," he begins, and sighs, looking down again. "I want so much for you. But I don't want you to be captive in my home and a slave to my and my wife's whims."

Will's eyes flash. "Do you think she'll stay with you, after what we've done?"

"We have had a long and happy marriage," Hannibal replies mildly.

"And what if she asks for a divorce?" Will presses.

Hannibal presses his lips together, and meets Will's gaze again. Will doesn't look angry, which is strange because he definitely sounds it. He almost looks panicked. Hannibal tilts his head to one side, frowning. "Are you more worried that she will, or that she won't?"

Will rubs his neck again and looks away. "Never mind," he replies, and stands, going to his folded clothes. He fishes out his phone and frowns down at it, unlocking the device. "Jack texted me." His jaw clenches. "There's been a murder. Third one like it. Whole family shot at dinner."

Hannibal hums.

Will looks up. "He asked for you, too."

Hannibal smiles. "Of course he did."

"Shit," Will growls. He looks away. "I really need to get home and check on the dogs."

"How about this," Hannibal says, standing and approaching Will. He takes Will's hands in both of his after Will sets his phone down. "I will stay here and meet Bedelia, and deal with whatever that conversation entails. You go home, tend to your animals, and we will meet Jack at the crime scene. Separately."

Will watches him for a long moment, before he nods and lowers his gaze. "Thank you," he whispers, so utterly grateful that Hannibal has to wonder what he had been thinking about before Hannibal came to him. "I'll text you the address when I get to the house."

Hannibal smiles, and cups Will's jaw and pulls him in to place a gentle kiss to his forehead. "I can make you something for the road," he says. "Coffee, and breakfast, while you shower, if you want to."

Will smiles weakly, and shakes his head. "I'll be fine," he replies. He goes to his clothes and starts to unfold them and pull them on. Hannibal retrieves his shirt and lounge pants and dons them, walking Will to the front door. Will hesitates, then shoulders his coat.

He looks at Hannibal. "Can I have the mask and collar back?" he asks.

Hannibal nods, and retrieves his satchel from his kitchen. He hands it to Will. He doesn't ask why Will wants it. Perhaps it is a sense of self-preservation for his own happiness. He feels strangely off-kilter now, like watching everything through a funhouse mirror.

Then Will smiles, shouldering the bag, and everything seems right for a brief moment. Will kisses him, gentle and chaste, and presses his nose to Hannibal's neck in a soft nuzzle, before he pulls away and heads to his car. Hannibal waits until he's safely inside before he closes his front door, pleased to note that at least it isn't snowing anymore, and the plows have already begun their work.

Hannibal is making breakfast when Bedelia calls him. He answers the phone with a warm greeting;
"Good morning, my love."

"Hannibal," she says, her voice aloof as it can be. "Did you have an eventful night?"

"No more eventful than yours, I'm sure," Hannibal replies smoothly, smiling as he flips over sausage patties on the pan.

She pauses, and then sighs. "We need to talk about this," she says.

"My house is always open to you," he replies.

"I'll be there in twenty minutes," she says, and hangs up. Hannibal hums to himself and finishes cooking the sausage, fries some eggs, and settles down with a mug of tea just as he hears the front door open. He hasn't showered, and knows that even her less-honed sense of smell may be able to pick it up.

Again, Will makes him feel rude.

He smiles at her as she walks into the dining room. She takes off her coat and folds it over one of the other chairs, sets her purse on the table, and sits at his right hand. "Would you like something to eat, or drink?" he asks her, taking a bite of sausage patty.

"No, thank you," she replies. She swallows, her eyes on Hannibal's food. She presses her lips together and folds her hands on the edge of the table, sitting straight like her posture will save her neck.

Hannibal continues to eat, letting her stew in her own thoughts and marinate in her misery. Finally, she relents. "Did you mate with him?" she whispers. Her expression is drawn, her face pale and sad.

Hannibal nods. "Yes," he replies. "For all intents and purposes, our partnership has become a trinity."

"More like an arch," Bedelia says. "I am on one side, he is on the other, you form the point in the middle."

"I feel obligated to say that is through no fault of my own," Hannibal replies. "Nor his." He regards her. "Besides, you have your own point as well. We are a square without a top edge, my love."

"It didn't have to be this way," she whispers. She swallows harshly. "Why couldn't you have just chosen Anthony?"

"Why couldn't you have just accepted the terms that you yourself laid?" Hannibal returns. "May I remind you, my love, that you proposed surrogacy. You said we would find Omegas we thought suitable and move forward with whoever we both agreed on. You wrote the contract. You insisted that I play with Will every day."

He stops himself before his tone can get any harsher and takes a drink of tea. His voice feels rough and his throat still hurts very badly.

She looks down at her hands. "I didn't think it would happen this way," she says.

"What would happen?" Hannibal asks.

She swallows, and reaches into her purse, pulling out a thin manila folder. Hannibal knows what's inside before she even says it. Hannibal sighs when she sets it down between them. "I had hoped to make you happy," he says.

She smiles. "You did," she says, her eyes watery. "For a very long time."

"And Anthony makes you happy now?" he asks.

"Yes," she replies with another nod. "He makes me feel safe."

"He can't protect you like I can," Hannibal murmurs. He's not sure why he says it – this is something he saw coming, of course, but he still feels blind-sided by it. "Would you be doing this if I hadn't asked to mate with Will?"

"I wouldn't be doing this if you hadn't told me you knew about Anthony," she replies. "I suppose it made me realize…there are some secrets I can't keep from you, Hannibal. And there are some secrets I can't keep for you, either."

Hannibal hums, taking a bite of his eggs. "Should I be worried?" he asks.

She shakes her head. "No," she replies. "I'm not doing this out of maliciousness. I don't want to hurt you. I never have. But Will clearly satisfies something in you I never could, just as Anthony satisfies something in me that you are incapable of sating."

"Will would have behaved," Hannibal says. "Don't blame him for this."

"I'm not," Bedelia replies. "I blame whatever happened to you to make you like this. I blame myself for allowing us to continue with such tension." She huffs, and looks away again.

"You're reacting very differently than I expected."

Hannibal smiles. "Are you afraid I would try to eat you?" he asks.

Her throat flexes, unbitten, unmarked. It will never be marked. She doesn't have that kind of desire in her. "You are a practical, evolved man, my love," she murmurs. "But you have not been yourself lately. Nor have I. I'll admit I have behaved ungraciously."

Hannibal pauses, and nods. "As have I," he replies. "I have been less than attentive to you, as a husband and a partner. I apologize."

Bedelia manages a weak smile. "I hope we can remain friends," she says.

"Of course," Hannibal replies. He sets his fork down and reaches out to take her hand. She squeezes his fingers gently, and then sighs. She spins the wedding ring on her finger, and then takes it off and sets it on top of the folder. Hannibal does the same with his.

"You can drop these off or fax them to my office when you're ready," she says, standing. "Thankfully there is not much we need to worry about splitting."

"Yes," Hannibal says, smiling. "It's almost like we were prepared for this eventuality."

She pauses, and smiles at him. "Practical people," she says. She takes her coat and folds it over her arm. "I know you don't need it, but I'm willing to offer my assistance with Will during his pregnancy, and anything else. You need only ask."

Hannibal raises an eyebrow. "…Thank you," he says. She nods and leaves, and Hannibal eyes the folder for a long moment, before he sighs, sitting back.

He feels strangely disappointed. Not in the situation – no, that had worked out as well as it could have, he supposes – but in himself. It feels like a failure. He was not able to keep his house and home in order while taking a new mate, despite his best intentions and attempts. Will has utterly consumed him, and as a result, he behaved rashly, impulsively, and ripped apart the longest-standing relationship he has ever had.

But Anthony will make Bedelia happy. And if he doesn't, Hannibal will have no trouble showing his displeasure.

Chapter 12

Will texts him the address of the murder as he promised, and Hannibal gets in his car and drives to it, knowing he will get there before Will does. He's not sure what to label the emotions he's feeling – they are too distant, sitting on the top of a far-off hill like an army waiting to lay siege to his mind. He knows they will eventually storm down the hill and overrun him, or set up their encampments and grow in strength unless he rides out to meet them. But he doesn't want to.

He had signed the papers and they sit in the backseat of his car. The wedding rings are still on the table in his house. He had never given much thought to the presence of his ring – he had worn it for so long that it felt as natural against his skin as his hair or his teeth. Now that he's not wearing it anymore, he doesn't miss its presence, but notices it like he'd notice if Bedelia suddenly dyed her hair, or someone painted a room in his house a different color.

He thinks about the conversation he shared with Will about psychopaths. They are typically loners, and linger on the outskirts of society except the interactions they indulge in. Lawyers, CEO, the clergy…journalists…law enforcement. People capable of forming bonds and having families that are shiny on the face of magazine covers. He knows that's what he had – a perfect-looking wife and a marriage that was, for all intents and purposes, strong and unified. Having Bedelia put him out of the immediate radar of suspicion; after all, what kind of woman would stay with a psychotic murderer for so long?

Having children would have helped that image. He wonders, idly, if the thought has ever crossed Bedelia's mind as well. Her divorce contract made no mention of children, nor Will. The surrogacy contract is essentially voided. She has no claim to any family Hannibal tries to create now.

Even though Hannibal entered into this arrangement to make her happy, he finds himself strangely excited at the thought of building a family with Will, in a way he seldom was with Bedelia. Will is eager and sweet to him, the darkness he prowls within calls out to Hannibal's own, and Hannibal wants to dive into it in direct opposition to the light of Bedelia he found himself constantly trying to navigate.

In the darkness, everything glows in technicolor, and it's beautiful.

It is unfair and wrong to say that Hannibal never loved her. She is a fine woman, a gentle spouse, a beautiful consort and partner. Hannibal will treasure all of the years they had together. And he doesn't believe it's the fact that Will is a man, or that Will is an Omega, that makes him so much more suitable to Hannibal's inclinations and desires. No, Hannibal thinks it is simply the fact that Will *is*, as he and Alana have noted on several occasions.

Hannibal finds himself smiling when Will texts him again, saying that he's on his way and should arrive at the crime scene within the hour. The trip is much shorter for Hannibal, so he takes his time, drives under the speed limit with no rush since he knows Will is not going to be there when he arrives.

Hannibal pulls up at the end of a lovely suburban road. The road has been completely closed off, littered with police, morticians, and the FBI. Hannibal gets out of his car and gives a nod of greeting to the policeman patrolling the perimeter. He ducks under the tape and approaches Jack, who is wrapped up against the cold weather and speaking with another agent.

Jack gives him a nod as he approaches, and then presses his lips together. "Doctor Lecter," he greets. "Thank you for coming."

"It's my pleasure, Jack," Hannibal replies with a smile. He looks around and feigns surprise. "Where is Will?"

"On his way," Jack replies. So Will didn't tell Jack that he had spent the night in Hannibal's company. Hannibal wonders what Jack will make of the new bites on Will's neck and the subtle change in his scent that means his heat is approaching. He finds himself taking mental note of how many Alphas are gathered here, and if he will need to watch any of them lest they get too curious and too close to Will.

"What do we have here?" he asks.

"Whole family, shot and killed at dinner," Jack replies. He huffs an aggravated sound. "No witnesses. No one heard the gunshots."

"No one looks outside during family time," Hannibal says mildly. "Shall we go inside?"

Jack shakes his head. "I want to wait for Will," he replies, and Hannibal gives a nod of concession. Jack hums, his eyes on the house. "Have you and Will been spending more time together?"

Hannibal smiles. "Why do you ask?"

"You keep looking around for him," Jack replies.

Hannibal tries not to let his expression change. "He has a remarkable gift," he replies. "I'm eager to see it in action again. And, forgive me, but I assumed you called me here because he was here." He pauses. "He told me you think my presence encourages him, sharpens his sight."

"Am I wrong?" Jack asks.

"I find it impossible to say, one way or the other," Hannibal replies mildly. Jack hums again.

"You told me you were acquaintances, the last time I asked about him," Jack says. Hannibal nods. "Maybe I just like knowing who Will knows."

"You and I knew each other before I knew Will," Hannibal says.

"And now we all know each other," Jack says.

Hannibal sighs, his breath steaming in the frigid air. "Is there something you'd like to ask me more directly, Jack?"

Jack pauses, and turns at the sound of another car. "I think I'll have my answer soon enough," he replies. Hannibal turns and follows his gaze, smiling when he sees Will drive up and park next to Hannibal's car. He gets out, his cheeks are flushed from the heat of his car, his hair damp and curling at his ears. He spies both of them immediately, feeling the Alphas' eyes on him, and lifts his hand in a little wave as he approaches.

He's wearing a turtleneck and has the collar of his coat pulls up high to hide the marks on his neck. Hannibal's smile widens and he fights back the urge to purr as Will approaches.

"Afternoon, Jack," Will says, his hands deep in the pockets of his coat. He looks to Hannibal and gives him a nod. "Doctor Lecter."

Hannibal smiles. "It's good to see you again, Will," he says for appearance's sake.

Will offers him a small, fond smile, before he shivers. "Shall we?" he asks.

Jack nods and leads the way into the house. Everything looks picturesque inside, from the clean laminate floors to the pictures of the family on the walls. The entire home appears like it was a place of vibrancy and laughter.

"This way," Jack murmurs, and goes into the dining room. After a moment, Will sucks in a steadying breath, and follows.

The room is full of the smell of old meat and death. Hannibal presses his lips together, taking in the sight of the family as they sit, dropped in place over each setting. The head of the table is empty. Hannibal sees the mother, her face turned towards the empty space, the rest of them face-down in their meals.

Will sucks in a shaky breath and when Hannibal looks at him, he sees Will run a hand through his hair. His fingers are trembling.

"Clear the room," Jack orders, and the photographers and forensic analysts hurry to obey, until it's just the three of them left. "Doctor Lecter," Jack says, and takes Hannibal's arm, forcing him to step back and allow Will to look upon the tableau without interruption.

Will takes a pair of surgical gloves that Jimmy hands him on his way out and puts them on. He closes his eyes and takes in a deep breath.

When his eyes open, his nostrils are flared like he's scenting the air, and his eyes are sharp and focused at the head of the table. "The table has been set," he whispers, walking slowly to the empty space. "Family dinner. I wasn’t invited."

He stops behind the mother, looking down at her for a moment, before he keeps going. "I take my seat at the empty plate," he says, and pulls the chair back, sitting down. "This is my

seat. My place setting, next to Missus Turner's." He pauses, and looks around the family. "I am the guest of honor."

Hannibal watches as Will closes his eyes, sucking in another breath. His entire posture goes lax, sitting at ease, in comfort. He is in the mind of the killer. His eyes, when they open, are sharp and assessing on the place of the youngest child.

A smile graces his face, indulgent and fine. "No one has taken a bite of their dinner. Except the youngest." He clears his throat and sits forward, pointing at the youngest body. "No one is bound. No one leaves the table. All afraid to move." He cocks his head to one side. "Even the little ones behaved themselves."

He looks up, seeing something Hannibal and Jack cannot. His eyes rake over the scene, his smile widening with something like affection. "I brought my new family to this home invasion, controlling the Turners with threats of violence."

Then, the affection melts from his face. He looks cold, commanding. Hannibal feels a spark of heat when he says; "Threats that turned to action."

He closes his eyes, sighing. Hannibal imagines the sound of the guns going off, felling the family. "The Turner family is executed simultaneously, with the exception of Missus Turner. She dies last."

He opens his eyes again, looking at the mother. His face is pale now, clammy at the forehead. He rubs his hand over his mouth. "This is my design," he whispers.

He straightens, turns his hand into the shape of a gun and points it at where Missus Turner's head would have been. "I shoot Mrs. Turner, gun against the canvas of her forehead. I look her directly in the eye when I pull the trigger."

He grits his teeth, like he's fighting the urge to do it. His hand jerks and Hannibal can almost hear the sound of the gun. Will flinches when he does it, gasping as his eyes go glazed for a moment. When they refocus, they're on Missus Turner's open, staring eyes. He lets out a quiet whimper and Hannibal's fingers curl, wanting to go to him and soothe his mate's distress.

Jack steps forward. "What do you see, Will?"

Will's voice is hoarse, cracking around the edges. "Family values," he murmurs.

"Whose family values?"

Will shivers, shaking his head. He stands abruptly, the chair scraping back. "I need a second," he says, and strides out of the dining room.

Hannibal follows him as Jack calls the analysts and photographers back in. Will is standing in the living room, entranced by a family portrait on the wall. He frowns, lifting shaking fingers to touch the face of one of the children.

Hannibal turns as Jack enters the room. "They were Karen and Roger Turner. Childhood sweethearts. They owned a successful Real Estate business. Pillars of the community. Three

children."

Will's eyes flash. He bares his teeth. "Minus one," he says.

Jack nods, his eyes on the portrait. "A son, Jesse. He disappeared last year – the last confirmed sighting had him boarding an RV at a rest area on route forty-seven. A runaway. Or an abduction."

Will cocks his head to one side. "Or both."

Jack nods, huffing. "Hundreds of tips, but not a single one held up past lunchtime. When misery rains, she pours."

Hannibal looks up at the portrait, at the smiling faces of the family. Will's scent is thick with distress and Hannibal wonders what he's thinking. Omegas are genetically predisposed to the idea of family – they want to create those kinds of close, trusting social bonds. Back in the less civilized days, it was a matter of survival, to have an Alpha and children who would defend and care for them during vulnerable times.

Will swallows tightly. "Holidays, vacations, milestones…. It never reveals the whole picture."

Jack huffs. "Who wants to fill their scrapbook with arguments and dirty laundry?

Will makes a rough, aggravated sound. The spark in his eyes is closer to anger than any other emotion Hannibal can identify. "False faces in family portraits," he growls. The gold in his eyes is burning when he looks at the Turners. "Layers and layers of lies betrayed by a sad glint in a child’s eyes."

Hannibal hums, turning to Jack. "Are there any signs of forced entry? Defensive wounds?"

Jack shakes his head. "No to the first. And all the family have defensive wounds, except Missus Turner."

Will turns to look back to the dining room. "There was acceptance in her body position. Forgiveness, even."

Hannibal raises an eyebrow. "What kind of victim forgives her killer at the moment of her death?" he asks.

Will's eyes flash, then widen with realization. He swallows again, and his exhale is unsteady. He looks at Hannibal. "A mother," he whispers.

Hannibal tilts his head to one side, and then looks at the smiling face of Jesse Turner.

Jack releases Will and Hannibal after the reading, and Hannibal follows Will to his car. Will is shaky and on-edge, bristling at the corners like a static-covered cat. Hannibal can smell his distress and his anger and fights the urge to soothe him with a hand in his hair or on his neck while they are still in public.

Will stops by his car, leans against the hood. His hands are in his pockets again and Hannibal can see the bulge of his clenching fists. "His own Goddamn mother," he hisses, snarling the words. His eyes are bright and fixed on Hannibal's shoes.

Hannibal hums. "Something must have happened to him that was very traumatic," he says mildly.

Will shakes his head. "Jesse looked like he was going to be Omega," he says.

Hannibal raises an eyebrow. The Turners had been an Alpha-female pair. Omegas are the only ingredient that allows a child of any of the three sexes. "Omegas are not possible, given that parental pair."

"Exactly," Will replies, raising his eyes.

"Do you think Missus Turner had an affair?"

Will shrugs one shoulder. "Not really any of my business," he says sharply. "They might have adopted. Or used a surrogate." He pulls his hands out of his coat and runs them through his hair. "Omegas are always treated differently," he mutters. "Either they are revered, or they are outcasts. Especially in a large family. Everyone wants one, or wants anything but one."

Hannibal smiles. "You seem to think the Turners were more inclined towards the latter."

Will bares his teeth, his eyes flashing. He drops his gaze from Hannibal's and looks at the ground. He presses his lips together and closes his eyes. "I can't imagine losing a child like that," he whispers. "Not knowing where he is. If he's dead…"

Hannibal loses the fight against his own propriety in that moment. He steps forward and cups Will's hands and Will looks at him. "I would never allow anything to happen to your children, Will," he murmurs.

Will growls, his fingers curling. "You were willing to sign away all paternal rights to a child, if it was a female or Omega."

"And now I have turned fully. Any child you bear me would be welcome in my home, and I would protect and guard it like I would my mate, or myself."

Will presses his lips together, frowning, and cocks his head to one side. "What about Bedelia?" he asks.

"What do you mean?"

"Like you would protect your mate, or yourself. You didn't mention your wife. Why?"

Hannibal sighs, releasing Will's hands. He admits he would have had to bring this up to Will eventually, but he's at a loss of how he would have done it. He supposes now is as good a time as any. "Bedelia asked for a divorce," he says. "She brought by the papers this morning, and I signed them."

"*What*?" Will demands, pushing himself upright. "I – *no*. God *damn* it, I -." He snarls, turning away from Hannibal and taking a step from him, only to whirl around and level his glare on Hannibal's face. "I asked you if you were having marital troubles. You lied to me!"

"No, I didn't lie," Hannibal replies with a shake of his head. Will snarls at him again, his voice raw and angry. "I still love her very much, and I know she loves me. But she cannot have Anthony if I do not accept him, and I cannot have you and make her happy at the same time."

Will lets out a weak, defeated sound. His eyes are bright, and his scent is thick with the sugared-lemon bitterness of his distress. "I'm not a homewrecker," he says coldly. "That's what you've made me. A mistress and a whore."

Hannibal shakes his head vehemently. He reaches for Will again and Will doesn't fight him, but his shoulders are tense and his breathing is unsteady like he's having a panic attack. "This isn't your fault," he murmurs. "It's no one's fault."

"How dare you," Will whispers, clenching his jaw. He pulls away and Hannibal chases him, pins him against his car door and puts a hand in Will's hair. Will shivers, sucking in a breath, his jaws parted to get more of Hannibal's scent.

He hears someone clear their throat, and looks to the side to see Jack regarding them, expectant and grim. "Don't let me interrupt," he says, even though he did just that.

Will stiffens, swallowing harshly. "Sorry, Jack," he murmurs, and Hannibal lets him go and takes a step back. "The crime scene…hit me hard. Doctor Lecter was helping me."

Jack hums. "Well, if you're going to continue, you can do it somewhere else. You're stinking up the place."

Hannibal wants to growl at him, but he refrains. "Will, perhaps you will let me take you to lunch," he says, trying to stay as mild-mannered and calm as he can. "And we can talk about why this crime scene has you so distressed."

Will swallows, bares the edges of his teeth, but he nods. He gets into his car and Hannibal gets into his and Will leads the way away from the road and the crime scene. He turns down towards a shopping center and Hannibal follows, parking behind Will when Will comes to a halt in the parking lot. He's surprised that Will even decided to stop somewhere, and didn't simply try to drive home just to see if Hannibal would chase him there.

Of course, Hannibal would. Even if Will tried to lose him on the highway, Hannibal knows where he lives. He could find Will anywhere.

Will gets out of the car but doesn't make a move to go anywhere. There's a Chipotle, a McDonald's, and a supermarket in their immediate vicinity. Nowhere Hannibal would deign to eat, and Will must know that.

Before Hannibal can get out of his car, Will walks to the passenger side and climbs in. Hannibal hums, keeping the car idling so that they can stay warm.

Will doesn't look at him. They sit, staring at a mother wrangling her children on the way into the supermarket. They see a young couple come out of the McDonald's with grease-stained paper bags, laughing and playfully shoving at each other.

Will heaves a shaky breath. When Hannibal looks at him, he sees tears brightening Will's eyes. "I didn't want this to happen," he murmurs.

Hannibal cocks his head to one side. "I find it remarkable that you think this was something you could control," he replies. "That any of us could control."

"I tried," Will says, his voice breaking. "I tried to curb your regard for me. I tried to keep my distance. But you kept coming, swimming through my consciousness and clouding my vision. I'm in a fog and there's nothing but cliffs around me and I could fall with one wrong step."

Hannibal sighs. "Your nihilism is unwarranted," he says.

"A long and happy marriage has fallen apart because of one loose screw," Will replies darkly. "How long until the next loose screw, Doctor Lecter? What happens when, ten years from now, we have children and another on the way and you meet an Omega or woman who you simply cannot resist?"

Hannibal smiles. "I don't believe that would happen."

"Did you believe this would happen?" Will bites back.

Hannibal nods, humming. "No," he admits. "But I have been thinking about this a great deal. You are a man who simply *is*, Will. Just as I am. No problems or loose ends that we need worry about." He pauses. "What would you do, if you were in that position? If you thought my attentions were starting to stray?"

Will makes a dark, angry sound. His eyes flash. "I don't think I should say."

Hannibal smiles, and thinks of Mason Verger. "It would be self-defense," he says coolly. "Defense of your heart, and your home, and your family."

He can feel Will's eyes on his face, and he meets Will's dark gaze. "I won't say I'm pleased by this turn of events," he says softly, reaching out and taking one of Will's warm hands, lacing their fingers together. "It came as a shock to me, but not as a surprise. I suppose the question you should be asking yourself, my darling, is not if I might ever stray, but if you would let me go, if I did?"

Will's upper lip twitches back in a snarl. His fingers tighten in Hannibal's. "No," he replies.

"And if anyone threatened our children, or threatened me, would you do whatever you had to?"

"A thousand times," Will breathes.

Hannibal's smile widens and he lifts Will's hand to kiss his knuckles. "So would I," he replies.

Will's fingers curl. The bitterness is edging away from his scent. "That's it, then," he says softly. "Mutually assured destruction."

"A mutually assured future," Hannibal replies. "With all the rough and broken edges, and all of its consequences."

Will sighs. He pulls his fingers away and folds both hands in his lap. "I'm sorry for how I behaved at the crime scene," he says. "I made it all about me. It was selfish and egotistical."

"It was a distressing scene," Hannibal says with a nod. "Made more so, I'm sure, by the very nature of it. Family values were violated and perverted there."

"It could have easily been any family," Will says. "The new family, with Jesse now, he's loved within it."

"Oh?"

"The family that kills together stays together," Will adds with a sharp smile. "The leader has to be female. Otherwise Mister Turner would have used his Voice on her. And the others must still be adolescents, otherwise it would have been the same."

"Do you think Jack suspects the same?"

"He's a sharp man, with sharp eyes," Will replies. "He likes to take me out as a one-trick pony. I think he's morbidly fascinated by what I can do, he likes watching me get into the minds of killers, likes watching me change."

"Why do you think that is?" Hannibal asks, curious.

"Like I said, either families want an Omega, or they want anything but," Will replies. He sighs and tilts his head back, sitting lax and comfortable in Hannibal's passenger seat. Hannibal's eyes fall to his neck, hidden behind his clothes. He wants to tear the offending piece of clothing away so he can see his marks. "When I read a crime scene, it is as close to Alpha as I will ever be."

"You think Jack wishes you were an Alpha?"

"It has its perks," Will replies, smiling coyly. He slants his gaze towards Hannibal and his smile widens. "I think Jack lives in fear of the day when I mate, and go into heat, and get pregnant. He'll lose his favorite toy."

"Do you think you'll want to stop working for him?" Hannibal asks.

"I already do," Will replies. He pauses, pressing his lips together, like he's debating what he wants to say next. "Have you ever gone to an art gallery and looked at all the beautiful paintings, the etchings, the mosaics and works of creation, and thought to yourself 'I want to try that someday'?"

Hannibal smiles. "I learned to sketch in the Italian gallerias," he replies. "I understand completely."

Will's eyes flash, sharpen. "Do you?" he whispers.

And Hannibal knows Will isn't talking about art. "Yes," he replies. Then, remembering Will's comments about his cooking; "Some might call it selfish."

Will blinks, and tilts his head to one side. He looks at Hannibal for a long, long moment. "That is how I feel about creating a family," he says quietly, like he's testing the waters of Hannibal's conversation. Is he talking about family, or something much darker than that?

Hannibal's smile widens, and he reaches out to thread his fingers through Will's hair. It's drier, now, curling and fluffy and soft against his skin. Will's eyelids flutter and he sighs. "Come home with me," he whispers, and Will sucks in another shaky breath. "I don't want you to be alone."

"I'm never alone anymore," Will replies, but he's smiling. "Now that I have you."

Hannibal takes Will by the neck and kisses him before the door has time to shut properly. Will gasps against his mouth, arching against him, his fingers curling tightly in the halves of Hannibal's coat. Hannibal growls, nips at Will's lower lip, and pushes his coat off of his shoulders to fall in a heap on the floor.

Will hisses, moaning against Hannibal's mouth as Hannibal grabs his sweater and hauls him close. "I can feel it," he whispers, unsteady, breathing hard. "It's a tidal wave. It's hot, and overwhelming. I feel like I'm going to drown."

His heat. Hannibal can smell it on the edges of his scent, bleeding into his skin. He growls and turns Will, shoving him against the wall, and kisses him again. Will whimpers when Hannibal grabs at his turtleneck and hauls it over Will's head, throwing it in a pile over his coat. Will is wearing a t-shirt underneath – *Hannibal's* shirt, he realizes, and the growl turns into a pleased purr.

Will's bitten neck is flushed and pink, begging for Hannibal's teeth. Hannibal bites his scruffy jaw and rakes his nails down Will's bared arms as Will arches against him. He spreads his legs as much as he can and Hannibal growls against his neck.

"Please," Will whispers, his hands tight on Hannibal's shoulders. "Please, Doctor Lecter, help me."

Hannibal lets out a low snarl, cups his hands under Will's thighs, and lifts him up. Will gasps, wrapping his legs tightly around Hannibal's waist and, once Hannibal is sure his grip is secure, he pulls Will from the wall and walks the short distance to his study.

He throws Will down onto the couch and shrugs off his coat and his suit jacket, before he returns to Will's heat. He buries his face in Will's neck and drags in a deep lungful of his scent, purring when he catches the cinnamon-coated edge of his heat between his jaws, coating his tongue.

His beautiful, dark-edged mate. Hannibal wants to tear him open at the chest and claw out Will's heart, devour him just as he would devour every other piece of Will. He pulls back and kisses Will's sweaty forehead, his slack mouth. He digs his nails into Will's flanks through his shirt and holds him tightly.

He unbuttons and unzips Will's slacks and pulls them down along with his underwear, just far enough to expose Will's slick heat. "Hands and knees," he commands, surprised when he feels his throat get tight and his voice tremble. It's the Alpha command, the Alpha Voice, and Will's eyes flash and he lets out a sound like he's just heard the most beautiful thing in the world.

He hurries to obey, rolling to his knees with his hands braced on the armrest of the couch. Hannibal turns his hands to his own clothes, not bothering to bare himself more than necessary. He frees his cock and covers Will, growling when he puts his teeth to Will's shoulder and mounts him just like that, raw and desperate.

Will is surprisingly slick, and howls when Hannibal sinks into him. His body tenses up, spasming and desperate for Hannibal to penetrate him. He bows his head and arches his back and Hannibal wraps one arm around Will's neck, fists his hand in Will's shirt, his other tight on Will's hip to hold him steady as Hannibal fucks him.

"Yes*, God*, yes," Will moans, sweaty and flushed and so sweet underneath Hannibal. He reaches back and puts a hand in Hannibal's hair, fingers curling tightly. Hannibal growls, tightening his grip until Will gasps and whimpers. Every time Hannibal sinks into him, Will lets out a punched-out, needy moan, as beautiful as any composition Hannibal has ever designed.

"My beautiful boy," Hannibal growls, not even sure what he's going to say, only certain that his voice is raw with the need to say it. His Voice is strong and he can see where it's sliding around Will's throat, choking him. "I'm going to take care of you, darling. You will never want for anything. You and I will create a new world together, I swear it."

"Hannibal," Will moans weakly, voice breaking on Hannibal's name. He turns his head and Hannibal steals his mouth in a kiss, drinks Will's lovely whimper when Hannibal sinks deeply into him. "Please – *please*."

Hannibal growls, releases Will's neck and hip and shoves his shirt up, cupping Will's tender chest. Will trembles, his body tightening down on Hannibal's cock, trying to force his knot. Will whines against his mouth, bares his teeth, his eyes heavy-lidded and glowing gold.

He's so incredibly slick, like he's in heat already, or the way he gets when Hannibal has been playing with him for a while and rendered him nothing more than a shaky, desperate mess. Hannibal purrs and Will gasps at the sound, closing his eyes and pressing his forehead against the couch.

"Please," he begs again. His Voice is coming through, weak and needy. Hannibal closes his eyes and sets his teeth to Will's nape. "Oh, *God*."

"That's it," Hannibal snarls. He wraps one hand around Will's cock, stroking him tightly as he feels Will bearing down on him. Will whimpers, flinching, bares his teeth and arches his neck against Hannibal's mouth, and Hannibal bites him hard enough to reopen the first mating mark he laid, Will's cinnamon-sweet blood filling his mouth as Will trembles and spills all over Hannibal's hand.

Hannibal snarls, thrusts deep. He can feel the head of his cock hitting something hard and tender. Will's stomach tenses whenever he does it. "Do you feel that, darling?" he asks, cupping Will's stomach with his dirty hand. "Your body is getting ready to conceive." The blood in his mouth makes his voice thick and wet, and he kisses Will's sore neck. "This is the place where my child will grow inside you, Will."

"*Yes*," Will gasps, wrecked and trembling. He covers Hannibal's hand with his own. It hurts him for Hannibal to fuck him this deeply, Hannibal can see his shoulders tense, oversensitive and raw, but he doesn't ask Hannibal to stop. He bows his shoulders, arches up as close to Hannibal as he can, eager to have him exactly where he is. "Fill it. Fill *me*."

Hannibal growls, clenching his eyes tightly shut and gritting his teeth as he thrusts as deep as he can, the itch at the base of his cock demanding he knot and breed the Omega pinned below him. His knot swells, locking them together, and he starts to spill thick and hot inside of Will's body where it's almost fertile.

Will trembles as Hannibal starts to fill him, his ass clenching up in rhythmic spasms like he's suffering through a second orgasm. His scent is unbelievably thick and sweet, like nectar and agave, and Hannibal licks over his sweaty, bloody neck, purring loudly in the otherwise silent room.

Then, Will goes lax, and Hannibal helps him curl up more comfortably on the couch, on his elbows and knees as Hannibal covers him. Then Will straightens out and Hannibal lays across him, petting gently down his flanks.

Will hums, taking one of Hannibal's hands, and lifts it so that he can use Hannibal's bicep as a pillow. Hannibal smiles and kisses his red cheek and Will sighs. "I should probably tell Jack I'll be indisposed for the next few days."

Hannibal hums, remembering how Jack had looked at them both next to Will's car. "Do you think he will suspect my involvement?"

"Oh, I'm sure of it," Will replies, sounding tired and sated. "Is it something you wish to hide?"

"Not at all," Hannibal says. "I'm simply trying to make sure none of your secrets are revealed before you're ready to reveal them."

Will hums. "I don't care what Jack thinks," he says mildly. "You have conjured a cavalier attitude in me."

Hannibal huffs a laugh, nuzzling Will's sweaty, tender neck. "You conjure many feelings in me," he replies gently, reverently. Will hums again. "I admire your ability to do so."

Will smiles, and turns so that he can take Hannibal's mouth in a kiss. "What can I say? I guess I have a knack for it."

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

> I was wondering why this chapter was fighting me so hard and then I realized it's lucky number 13! Haha.
> And if any of you have any mixed emotions at the end of the chapter, then I've done my job :D

Hannibal wakes with Will's scent in his lungs. He takes a deep breath, rolling over to try and press closer to the source, only to frown when he finds the other side of his bed is startlingly empty. He opens his eyes, his frown deepening as he sits up and sees no sign of Will, and no light coming from the bathroom.

He pushes himself to his feet in a hurry. Will is practically waist-deep in his heat and Hannibal doesn't like the idea of not knowing where he is. He follows his nose, glad that it seems Will's scent is still fresh in his house, and goes downstairs.

He hears Will's shaky voice. "Just bring it. Please." He enters the kitchen and sees Will sitting in front of the fridge, his face warm and flushed, his forehead shining with sweat. He has his phone in his hand and his eyes are closed.

Hannibal goes to him, putting his hands on the outside of Will's trembling thighs. Will's eyelids flutter and he opens them, revealing a sliver of shining gold. He whimpers, and Hannibal hears a voice coming through the other side of his phone.

"Will? Will!"

It's Alana. Hannibal coaxes the phone from Will's slack hand and holds it to his ear. "Alana?" he murmurs.

"Oh, Hannibal, thank God," she breathes. Will whimpers again, turning his face to rest his cheek against the door of the fridge. His skin leaves a smear of sweat on the stainless steel. "Is Will safe?"

"He's in my home," Hannibal replies. Will shivers, clawing frantically at his sweat-stained clothes. The scent of him is powerful, overwhelming in its intensity. He smells incredible, the finest feast teasing at Hannibal's nose. Hannibal's stomach tenses and he feels his body starting to react to the sweet, slick Omega cornered against his fridge. He needs to attend to Will as soon as possible. "What did he ask you to bring?"

"The mask and collar," Alana replies lowly, like she doesn't want to admit it. Hannibal hums, sighing through his nose, his lips pressed tight together so he doesn't bare his teeth. "I can

bring it by, but it will take a while for me to drive there and back."

"I appreciate it, Alana. Thank you," Hannibal says, and she hums and hangs up. Hannibal sets the phone down and cups Will's face in his hands. Will gasps, shaking, his breathing unsteady. He parts his jaws and sucks in a trembling breath, letting it out in a moan.

"Will," Hannibal murmurs, brushing his thumb over the red stain on Will's cheek. Will's eyes are unfocused and they can't lift any higher than Hannibal's chin. He pulls his knees up like he's trying to force Hannibal back. "Will, it's alright. I'm here."

Will shivers, letting out another pained-sounding moan. "It hurts," he stutters, curling his fingers and tugging at the cling of his underwear around his thighs. The material is damp with sweat and slick, a dark stain already formed between his legs. "I – I can't. It *hurts*."

"I can help," Hannibal says, distressed more than he cares to admit at seeing Will so frantic. He can smell Will's fear, souring the scent of his heat at the edges. He brushes Will's sweaty hair back from his face and tries to meet Will's eyes.

Will shakes his head, trying to push Hannibal away. "I have to –." He stops, going tense when another wave of heat racks his body, forcing himself silent. "I can't. I need the – *fuck,* Alana. I need to call Alana."

"She's on her way," Hannibal says, trying to keep his voice as low and soothing as possible. "She's bringing your mask and collar. She's coming, Will."

Will trembles. His eyes widen, and he meets Hannibal's gaze, and sucks in a breath. "Hannibal," he whispers, like he's only just now realizing who is talking to him. Hannibal senses that the heat in his head is making it difficult to think. It's hard for himself to think, too – all he can picture is putting his neck in Will's teeth, baring his sweaty skin, wringing every grunt and moan and cry he can from Will until they're both sated and spent.

Will whimpers. His hands stop pushing and cling to Hannibal instead, his knees spreading as he pulls Hannibal closer. "Mount me," he growls, as desperate and needy as he has ever been. Hannibal shivers, hearing Will's Voice thick in his mouth.

Hannibal wraps his fingers around Will's thighs, tugging him into Hannibal's lap, and turns and lays him out on the kitchen floor. Definitely not his first choice for Will's heat, but he doesn't think he could manage to get Will upright, much less upstairs.

Will growls at him, clawing at his chest through his shirt. He rears up and sinks his teeth into Hannibal's neck and Hannibal moans, closing his eyes at the sharp point of pain Will's teeth bring to his flesh.

Then Will gasps. His jaws abruptly loosen and he scrambles back. "Shit. *No*." He covers his mouth and curls up again, clenching his eyes tightly shut. "Damn it. No, *no*."

"Will," Hannibal says, reaching out to him. He puts his hands on Will's shoulders and Will growls at him, trying to fight him off, but Hannibal is stronger and his head, though clouded, is much clearer than Will's. Will is acting on pure instinct, and why that instinct is telling him

to control his teeth and flee is something Hannibal will have to address later, when Will is more calm.

He hauls Will close to him by the shoulders and wraps his fingers around the nape of his neck, forcing his submission. "Be still," he growls, forcing his Voice to come through. The nape of an Omega's neck is the most sensitive part to them and the fastest and sharpest way to trigger their submission. Will goes lax – because Hannibal's Voice came from him, it affects him the most powerfully. He wouldn't be able to fight it except in the most dire of circumstances.

Hannibal pulls him close, turns Will until he's on his knees, and forces him to curl up against the kitchen floor with Hannibal's hand still tight on the back of his neck. Will is breathing harshly, his jaws parted, teeth bared. He looks wild, completely out of control, *predatory*. Hannibal is starting to see why Will – or his parents – would have sanctioned the creation of the mask and collar.

He slides closer and kisses Will's cheek, and Will whines so sweetly, plaintive, begging for Hannibal's mercy. "Hush, darling," Hannibal murmurs. "I'm right here. I'm going to take care of you."

"Please," Will whispers. "Please, I need – I need the -. The mask."

"Are you afraid of harming me, Will?" Hannibal asks.

Will shudders, closing his eyes. He swallows harshly and nods. "You can," Hannibal adds, and Will's eyes fly open and flash to his chest. "It's natural for Omegas to bite their mates, Will. You would only be following your instincts to do so."

Will bites his lower lip, swallowing harshly again. He moans, another tremble running down his spine, and rubs one hand over his face. "I can't fucking *think*," he murmurs, raspy and hoarse. "Please, Hannibal. Help me."

Hannibal nods, pressing his lips together. "Here's what's going to happen," he says, releasing Will's neck. Will's shoulders roll, tense, his hands curling tightly against his thighs. Hannibal makes sure to use his Voice, to force Will's obedience and also rob him of the need to think. If Will needs instruction, Hannibal is more than happy to provide it. "I'm going to call Alana back and tell her not to bring the mask and collar. I will tell her that you were afraid of hurting me, but she doesn't need to come. You will go to my bedroom and wait for me there."

Will's eyes flash. He sucks in a shaky breath, and nods. Hannibal nods as well, and takes Will's phone, before he helps Will to his feet.

Will sags against him, breathing heavily. He licks over Hannibal's neck where the bite mark is pink and sore, and lets out a whimper of apology. "Hurry," he says, and Hannibal releases him so he can go upstairs. His steps are unsteady, and he moves without sound.

Hannibal calls Alana. "I'm sorry about before," he says when she picks up. "I've calmed Will down. He was panicked and spoke rashly. Please, don't trouble yourself with the mask and collar."

"Are you sure?" Alana asks, sounding worried.

Hannibal pauses. "Alana," he says, sighing heavily. "Why does Will have the mask and collar?"

She doesn't answer right away.

"Will and I are mated now," Hannibal says. "I would ask him, but he's in no condition to speak with me in his current state, and every second I delay, the worse his heat will get before I can calm him down. If there's something I should know about, I ask that you tell me now."

Alana sighs after another moment. "I told you that I played with Will, once, a long time ago," she says. Hannibal hums. "It was enough to trigger his heat. He attacked someone. I don't think it was the first time. He…goes somewhere, Hannibal. I can't describe it."

Hannibal raises his eyebrows. "Yet you still suggested that I use him as a surrogate," he replies.

"Well, if he's in his mask and collar, he can't really do much," she replies defensively. The kind of defensive she gets when she feels guilty.

Hannibal sighs. "Thank you for telling me," he says. "But you don't need to worry about the mask and collar. I can handle Will just fine."

"I know," Alana replies. "That's why I wasn't worried."

"I'll have him call you once he's recovered. Have a good day," Hannibal says, and then hangs up. He sets the phone down, leaning on the kitchen counter, deep in thought.

So, Will's belief in his own danger goes beyond thoughts of darkness, and Mason Verger. His heat makes him violent, and aggressive. Hannibal smiles.

He goes upstairs and frowns when he sees the door to his bedroom is slightly open, and there are no lights coming from inside. He cocks his head to one side, prowling forward slowly. Now that he knows Will is fully in a predator mindset, he will have to tread carefully.

He pushes open the door and blinks, his eyes adjusting to the darkness in the room. He hears a growl, and smiles, shutting the door behind him. He cocks his head to one side, listening for the shift of weight, the quick breath right before a lunge, any stir of the air that means Will is going to attack him.

He hums, circling the room towards the curtains. "Come out, darling," he calls. He senses eyes on him, Will navigating the room as he waits for the perfect time to attack. "I'm not going to hurt you."

He hears a snarl behind him, and smiles, letting out a low growl of anticipation. He turns, catches Will as he grabs Hannibal and turns them, throwing Will down onto the edge of the bed. Will has shed his shirt and as a result his slick skin provides little in the way of grip, so Hannibal has to use his claws to keep Will down.

Will's nails rake down his back through his shirt, his golden eyes shining in the darkness. Hannibal hauls him onto the bed and prowls over him, catching Will's wrists and pinning him down. He puts his teeth to Will's neck and Will goes still, trembling under his weight.

"Spread your legs," Hannibal commands, and Will whimpers, his thighs parting obediently. Hannibal snarls, rutting against the damp stain on Will's underwear, his eyelids fluttering closed as he feels Will's cock rub against his own. He drags his hands down Will's arms and wraps his fingers in Will's underwear, tugging it down his thighs.

Will's scent hits him and Hannibal's brain stutters to a halt. He gasps, and Will arches up, strong and forceful. He rears up on Hannibal, shoves him onto his back and crawls over him, his weight settling heavy on Hannibal's thighs.

He flattens his hands on Hannibal's chest, his throat rumbling, snarling lowly, and he drags his hands up until his fingers touch Hannibal's throat. Hannibal growls, hands tight on Will's hips. He's still clothed but his body wants to fuck, to knot, to mount Will brutally and prove himself as a prime Alpha, one that is capable of overcoming the predator in his bed.

"Alpha," Will snarls, and Hannibal bares his teeth when Will leans down. He drags his nose up Hannibal's jaw, breathing in deeply, and lets out a soft purr. "*Mine*."

He bares his teeth against Hannibal's neck, over the thrum of his pulse. Omegas don't have pronounced canines like Alphas but Will's come pretty damn close and Hannibal shivers when he feels Will's sharp teeth start to bite down. He'll break skin if Hannibal lets him. Hannibal wants him to.

But first, the natural order much be preserved.

He knots a hand in Will's hair and hauls him back, throwing him down on the bed. Will snarls, the sound loud and powerful in the darkness, and Hannibal finds his hips, rakes his nails up Will's flanks to force his survival instinct to kick in, and flattens one hand over the nape of Will's neck.

Will goes lax suddenly, trembling on his hands and knees. Hannibal growls, nosing at his sweaty hair, and covers Will with his weight.

Will whimpers. "I'm sorry," he gasps, shaking hard. "*God*, I'm sorry. Hannibal -."

"It's alright, Will," Hannibal murmurs, kissing the shell of his ear. Will trembles underneath him and Hannibal knows he has Will lax enough to forgo the second handhold. He pushes his lounge pants down to his knees and spreads Will apart, baring his slick hole. Will is so wet between his legs, soaked to the core, and Hannibal growls, his cock rutting through the slick staining his skin. He presses his cockhead against Will's hole and pushes inside.

Will moans, a shudder running through him as Hannibal sinks deep inside him. He's burning hot on the inside, so tight and slick it threatens to make Hannibal lose his damn mind. Hannibal lets go of Will's neck and grabs Will's wrists instead, keeping him pinned so he doesn't fight Hannibal as Hannibal mounts him.

Will gasps, turning his head to one side, cheek rubbing against Hannibal's. Hannibal gets the impression that Will is still trying to bite. But Will is making sweet, gentle whines, trying to appeal to Hannibal's better nature. "I'm sorry," he moans, like he's in pain. His fists clench up tightly in the sheets and he arches up against Hannibal's chest. "I called you 'Alpha'. I'm sorry, I'm -."

"Hush, darling," Hannibal murmurs, nuzzling Will's sweaty, red neck. "I forgive you."

Will sobs, closing his eyes, and rests his forehead against Hannibal's jaw. "Please," he gasps. "Use me. Take my pound of flesh."

"Oh, my darling boy," Hannibal grits out, his nails tightening in Will's wrists. His cockhead hits that hard, tender spot in Will with every thrust and he knows what he's smelling is Will's fertility now, his heat, cinnamon and mint and lemongrass and sugar. He wants to devour Will whole. "You're already mine."

"*Yes*," Will moans.

Hannibal growls, biting his shoulder. He draws Will's arms together, wraps the fingers of one hand around both of his wrists, and slides his other hand down Will's flank, to his hip, to hold him steady and force Will to bear his weight. Hannibal's shoulders and thighs are burning, every inch of him dedicated to mounting Will as brutally as possible, sating his heat and crushing them both together so that neither of them can tell where Will ends and Hannibal begins.

"Please," Will gasps, bowing his head, offering his neck for Hannibal's teeth. "*Please*."

Hannibal nuzzles Will's sweaty neck, licks the sweet salt from his skin. "I know about the mask and collar, Will," he says. Will's shoulders tense and he whines. "I know about the man you attacked. Why?"

Will snarls, turning his head so Hannibal can see the shine of his eyes.

Hannibal smiles. "When was your first kill, my dear?"

"I was sixteen," Will growls back.

Hannibal closes his eyes, shuddering at the sound of Will's raw, rough voice. "Why did you kill him?" he asks.

"Because I wanted to," Will replies. "Because I liked it."

Hannibal shivers. "When I thought you couldn't get any more glorious," he whispers.

Will moans, arching up against Hannibal's chest. "I'll tell you everything," he says. "Just, *please*. Make it stop. It hurts."

Hannibal sucks in a breath, closing his eyes, and buries his face in Will's hair. He imagines Will as he might look at sixteen, freshly-presented, his eyes golden as he prowls through the night. An empty park, perhaps, or suburban streets. His parents must have been worried sick

for him, been afraid when he returned that morning with blood on his hands and between his teeth. They might have made a mask and collar for him then, chained him up during the first year to keep him from wandering and killing again.

Will's father had been Omega. Omegas will do anything to protect their children.

He growls, the image of young, sweet Will ripping an Alpha's throat out combined with his incredible scent threatens to send him over the edge. His spine gets tense, steel and salt, and he tightens his hold on Will's hip and opens his mouth wide on Will's neck, biting down on his nape to make him go lax and stay still while Hannibal knots him.

"Yes*, yes*," Will whines, pliant and submissive under Hannibal's weight. He's shaking like he's trying to keep steady ground, breaking and shattering and revealing the darkness that Hannibal has only seen glimpses of, before.

In the darkness, there is no room for shame.

Hannibal slams into him, rutting to scratch the itch at the base of his cock. Will's body tenses, shudders, and Hannibal feels his ass getting tight around Hannibal as his knot grows, locking them together. Will's orgasm sweetens his blood as it fills Hannibal's mouth and he moans, pleasure sinking its nails into his spine and raking down.

Will growls, shivering, and turns his head to nuzzles Hannibal's temple. "Bite me again," he demands, his Voice strong, and Hannibal obeys, sinking his teeth into Will's shoulder this time and shedding blood. "Again," Will hisses, and Hannibal does with a weak moan. "*Hannibal*."

Hannibal shivers, and releases Will's wrists so he can put a hand over his mouth. If Will keeps going, Hannibal will bite down to his spine and rip him apart. His mouth is full of blood and saliva and he licks over the bite he left on Will's shoulder, purring loudly as Will moans.

He rolls his hips, forcing Will onto his stomach, and covers him. He cradles Will's jaw and kisses his blushing cheek, purring at the heat coming off his skin. Will sighs, going lax, and Hannibal releases his mouth.

Hannibal knows in the first day or so of Will's heat, he will gain some clarity between the insatiable need to be mounted and bred. During those times, Hannibal will be able to ask all of his questions.

Will sighs, and Hannibal claims his mouth in a kiss, overwhelmed by how much he adores Will in this moment. He doesn't think any words could do it justice; the ache in his heart and the heat in his stomach is without limit, feral and rough-edged, only soothed at the places where his skin touches Will's.

He finds an edge of a blanket and covers their bodies with it, cocooning himself and Will inside, and the last of the tension leaves Will's shoulders.

Will pulls his arms to his sides, his hands under his neck, and Hannibal wraps his arms around Will's chest. "Are you going to tell anyone?" he asks.

Hannibal shakes his head. "No," he replies. "Your secrets are mine, now."

Will swallows, letting out a quiet whine. "My stepmother thought I was going to present Alpha," he says. "She went all out – strength training, sports, Alpha stuff, you know. She was sure of it, right until I turned sixteen and had my first heat. When I presented, I felt like I was losing my mind. Nothing made sense."

"Jealousy is a powerful motivator," Hannibal murmurs.

Will huffs. "I thought I was going to be an Alpha," he says. "I'm not jealous of them."

"But you were trained like one. Bred and groomed to be one. And then you weren't. I imagine it conjured a lot of strong feelings."

"As soon as I became Omega, it only mattered who I mated with, who I bred with," Will says darkly.

"Did he try to touch you?" Hannibal asks, growling the words.

Will smiles. Hannibal can feel it when he presses his lips to Will's cheek. The air under the blanket is hot and damp with sweat, but Hannibal doesn't mind. It makes Will's scent all the more potent, as well as the new smell of their sweat mixing together.

"Wrong place, wrong time," Will replies.

"How many heats have you had, Will?" Hannibal murmurs. *How many people have you killed?*

"This is the third," Will confesses. "I forgot how much it hurts."

Hannibal sighs, purring and proud. He kisses Will's jaw and moves one hand to pet through his hair, stroking it back from his forehead. "I'm here," he whispers, and Will's breath leaves him in a shaky sob. "I'm going to take care of you."

Will turns his head and nuzzles Hannibal's cheek. He lets out a soft growl, and licks Hannibal's jaw. "I know."

Hannibal spends most of the day grooming and petting Will, keeping him calm and pliant as Will works through the first stages of his heat. He can tell every time the predatory, desperate side of him starts to surface. Will's eyes are lovely, a beautiful molten gold, but when he's close to that edge, they sharpen. He bares his teeth and snarls at Hannibal like they're two wolves fighting for territory, but Hannibal is a prime example of his species, and he delights when Will fights him just as often as when Will is pliant and sweet.

Intellectually, he has theories as to why Will is so aggressive and Alpha-like in his behavior. Ingesting Alpha blood to keep his Voice would likely conjure other instincts in him, just as hormone treatments would change another person. Coupled with his childhood and the Alpha-centric meals Hannibal has been feeding him, it's no surprise that Will's aggression is so high.

He puts Will on his back, the second time, kissing Will every time he growls, purring whenever Will's sharp nails rake down his back to mark him in turn. Will wraps his legs tightly around Hannibal's waist and he moans against Hannibal's mouth as Hannibal forces him through another orgasm. It's his third one this round, and his stomach is dirty and streaked with white, breaking up the red flush that has traveled down to his abdomen. He looks beautiful, thoroughly ravished, and the first day isn't even over.

"Please," Will gasps. He's trying to use his Voice but he can't make the right sounds. His neck is bloody and slick. Hannibal wonders if it's possible to rip out a man's Voice growth with mating bites. "Please, Hannibal, knot me. I need it."

"I will, darling," Hannibal whispers. He kisses Will again, cups his tender neck, and thrusts deeply into him again. Will's body is looser now, gushing with slick so that it feels like Hannibal is fucking a woman. But a woman would never whine so sweetly or bare their necks so readily for his teeth. Bedelia certainly never did. "But you must do something, first."

"Anything," Will says, desperate.

Hannibal smiles and kisses him again. "Bite me," he says. "Bind yourself to me. No more blood bags, no more freezers in your barn. You are mine, and your Voice is mine. I demand nothing less."

Will shivers. It's unfair of Hannibal to ask when he's so desperate, but it is the quickest way to give them what they both want. He knows Will wants to bite him. He can see it in Will's golden eyes.

Will's breath hitches when Hannibal touches his cock, smearing his slick and seed in his hand and wrapping his fingers tightly around Will's cock. He's in pain, Hannibal knows he must be so sensitive, but he doesn't ask Hannibal to stop.

Finally, Will caves, and wraps his fingers around the back of Hannibal's neck. He leans up, licks over Hannibal's throat and sets his teeth in the muscle at the side of his neck, where he'd tried to first bite Hannibal in his kitchen. Hannibal shivers, falling over Will, digging his nails into Will's back as the urge to knot threatens to consume him.

Will licks over his neck again, taunting him. "You're mine, as well," he growls. His nails dig into Hannibal's nape and Hannibal snarls. "Your secrets and your blood is mine. Promise me."

"Everything," Hannibal breathes. "Yes."

Will hums, sounding pleased, and he opens his mouth wide and sinks his teeth into the side of Hannibal's neck, breaking skin. Hannibal growls, raking his nails down Will's back, and

thrusts in one more time before his knot swells, locking them together once more. Will's body tenses up, milking his knot, and Will moans low and sinful as he swallows a mouthful of Hannibal's blood.

Hannibal yanks him away by his hair and kisses him, licking the blood from Will's teeth. "You beautiful creature," he moans, kissing Will passionately. Will's hands gentle, sated for now, warm and flat down Hannibal's spine.

Will starts to purr, the sound tugging on Hannibal's chest, compelling him to cover and appease his mate. He kisses Will again, and again, until he is starved for air and his lungs start to ache. Will pets through his sweaty hair, moans into every kiss, the most lovely and perfect companion Hannibal could ask for.

"I have something to show you, my dear," he says.

Will smiles, adoring and sated. "What is it?"

Hannibal smiles back and nuzzles Will's bitten neck. "My art."

Will is lucid enough to shower and redress after the second round, and Hannibal clothes himself again and takes Will's hand, leading him down to the kitchen. Will's eyes are wide and shining, anticipatory. He squeezes Hannibal's fingers as Hannibal leads him to the secret entrance to his basement in the floor. He opens it, and gestures for Will to go down the stairs.

Will looks at him, brow furrowed, but he goes down and Hannibal follows him. The lights come on automatically, revealing the steel grated floor, the table in the far corner where Hannibal cuts apart his kills, the meat hooks hanging from the ceiling and the shelf of tools and instruments on the wall.

Will stops, his eyes wide as he takes in the room, before he looks at Hannibal. "What is this?" he asks. Hannibal isn't sure if he's more shocked or afraid.

Hannibal sighs, putting his hands behind him, and looks around the room. "This is where I practice my art," he says. "Where I bring my meat, and prepare it."

"Your meat," Will repeats. He looks back at the room and steps farther into it. Then he turns around, his eyes wide. Fear. Anger. Hannibal can see it on his face. "What kind of meat?"

Hannibal smiles.

Will looks at him, and then his face changes into an expression of understanding. He looks like he should be horrified, but he isn't. Hannibal can tell that he isn't. Will puts a hand to his neck, swallowing. He's pale. "And…how often do you practice this art, Doctor Lecter?" he asks quietly.

"Whenever I get hungry," Hannibal replies.

"Oh my God," Will whispers. He turns around and walks to the center of the room. He reaches up and touches one of the meat hooks, fingers curling around the cold metal. "Did…. Did Doctor Du Maurier know?" He bows his head, and huffs, smiling tightly. "Of course she knew. Oysters."

"She never saw this room."

"Is this going to be my fate?" Will asks, looking up at the hooks again. "When you tire of me?"

"I would never," Hannibal replies, frowning. He goes to Will and Will doesn't flinch from him. He keeps his eyes lowered when Hannibal takes his hands. "I would never harm you, my dear."

Will sucks in a shaky breath. "Answer me honestly," he says. "Is she still alive? Did she really ask for a divorce?"

"Yes, to both," Hannibal replies. Will releases his breath just as unsteadily, nodding. Trusting. "I offer you a secret for a secret. A truth for a truth. You're a killer, Will. You see the world through the eyes of killers. I think that's why we get along so well."

"How long have you been doing this?" Will asks.

Hannibal smiles. "Since before you were alive, I think."

"Why are you telling me this now?" Will pulls his hands away. The anger is winning now. "You waited until I couldn't leave you, until I was bound to you."

"No," Hannibal replies, shaking his head. "Once I knew what kind of creature you were, I knew I had met my true equal. You have given me clarity, Will, and I wanted to offer you the same."

"What kind of creature I am," Will whispers, lifting his eyes. He regards Hannibal for a long, long moment. "I'm not like you," he growls. "I'm not -."

He stops. Hannibal lets him stew, lets that beautiful brain figure out the chaotic mess of his thoughts. He's sure Will won't run – he can't, and he certainly wouldn't make it far before Hannibal caught up to him.

Then, Will lifts his eyes. "I'm not like your wife," he hisses. "I'm not going to cower in the corner and pray that the day never comes when you decide you're a little too hungry and a little too impatient with me. I won't let you use my sins to control me."

"I would never dream of it," Hannibal replies, smiling. Anger is a powerful motivator; he likes Will when he's angry. He tilts his head to one side. "Are you going to try to hurt me, Will?"

Will presses his lips together, and rubs his hands over his face. He shivers, and shakes his head. "No," he replies. He looks back up at the meat hooks, his expression unreadable. "No."

He licks his lips and steps close to Hannibal, resting a hand on his chest. "But I want you to do something for me."

"Anything," Hannibal says, cupping Will's neck. Will doesn't tense up or flinch away. There's no fear in his eyes when he meets Hannibal's.

"This is a blank canvas," Will says, jerking his head back to the rest of the room. "I want to see your art. Your real art. Create a masterpiece for me."

Hannibal blinks at him, surprised at the request. Will smiles, loving and gentle, and leans up for a kiss that makes Hannibal's chest feel warm and tight. "Will you do it?" he asks.

"Yes," Hannibal breathes, and Will trembles against him. "For you."

Chapter 14

Hannibal mounts Will again when he sees the sharpness return to his eyes. Will is wild underneath him, encouraged by the shared knowledge and new, intimate truths forged between them. He sinks his teeth into Hannibal's neck, rakes his nails down Hannibal's spine, every muscle and inch of him dedicated to accepting Hannibal deep inside of him and coaxing his knot, his seed, his legacy.

Hannibal growls, his eyes closing as he flattens his hands on the innards of Will's thighs, digs his nails in and forces his knot inside of Will. Will's body is so incredibly slick, as tight as the first time Hannibal fucked him. His chest and face are red with arousal, his teeth caked in Hannibal's blood. He looks gorgeous, decadent, the finest feast offered only for Hannibal to devour.

Will trembles under him when Hannibal wraps a hand around his cock, stroking tightly. He whimpers, his arms going to Hannibal's shoulders and wrapping tight like he wants to drag Hannibal into his chest, consume him in his entirety. Hannibal kisses him, drinks the sated moan from Will's mouth when Will shivers and spills between their sweat-slick stomachs. His thighs go lax, releasing the tight hold around Hannibal's waist, and he falls back to the bed with a sigh, running a hand through his sweaty hair to push it back from his face.

Hannibal leans over him, kisses him again, his spine and lower back hot and clenching with every load he dumps inside of Will's fertile body. Will kisses him back, ardent and adoring, and nips at Hannibal's lower lip when they part for air.

Will's eyes are glowing gold, soft and bright. His hands gentle, cupping Hannibal's scruffy jaw, threading through his damp hair. He sighs. "Would you have told me?" he asks, and Hannibal rests their foreheads together as Will pets him, waiting out his knot. "If I was just… another Omega. Some sweet, submissive thing in your bed. Would you have shown me your true nature?"

Hannibal hums, nuzzling Will. "I don't know," he replies. "I'm not sure I would have entered into this arrangement at all, except that you proved to be so interesting. Even still, I'm in awe of you."

"Because I'm a killer?"

"Because you're like me," Hannibal says. He strokes a hand down Will's flank, reveling in the clench and shiver of Will's sensitive body against his. Like every touch Hannibal lays to him provokes a reaction he cannot hide.

"I'm not like you," Will replies softly. "You're art. I'm instinct. It's different."

"Different motivations create different kinds of art, but the end result for the both of us is the same."

"Have I met you before?" Will whispers. "Have any of the kills I've seen been yours?"

"It is possible," Hannibal says, smiling. "Are you asking something different?"

Will hums, tilting his head to one side to bare his neck. Hannibal kisses the newest bite, delighted when Will shivers. "The Minnesota Shrike?" he asks.

Hannibal shakes his head. "Not my work," he replies. "I have no interest in killing children."

"The Angel-maker?"

"You and Jack caught the Angel-maker," Hannibal says. "And the Shrike."

Will nods. He presses his lips together and meets Hannibal's eyes again. "…You said you've been doing this a long time, when you get hungry," he says. Hannibal nods. "…The Chesapeake Ripper?"

"I've always found it a crude name," Hannibal replies mildly, kissing Will's neck again. He feels Will's breath catch and closes his eyes, rolling his hips as his knot deflates and he can pull out of Will. Will's thighs tremble when he does it and the stink of sex, slick, seed, is thick in the air. Hannibal wants to bottle it and breathe it in when times get dark. But, of course, he has the source, willing and pliant in his bed.

"So you do not deny it," Will murmurs, his eyes wide.

Hannibal huffs, and nuzzles Will's exposed throat. "If I was the Ripper," he says softly, noting how Will's arms break out in goose bumps and he arches his neck against Hannibal's mouth, "would that make you afraid?"

"Should I be?" Will asks.

"I would never harm you, my dear Will," Hannibal vows. He pulls back and cups Will's jaw, forcing their eyes to meet. "Everything I have told you, everything I have confessed and promised, I know you will hold me to it. You have power over me; you cannot deny it."

"I don't deny it," Will replies, his breathing heavy. His eyes are darkening, the tidal wave of his heat looming on the horizon of his body, just out of reach but approaching fast. Hannibal can smell it, sharp in his scent. "I don't deny you."

Hannibal smiles.

"You must be careful," Will says. "I want to see your masterpiece, but when I see it, there will be others around. You cannot let me catch you."

Hannibal hums, petting his hand down Will's sore, tender neck. "What would you do, if I was caught?" he asks.

Will's eyes flash. "Whatever was necessary," he replies.

"Perhaps you should help me," Hannibal says. "We can compose a piece together."

Will smiles, off-kilter, eager. He is silent for a moment, and then lifts his head to claim Hannibal's mouth in a kiss. "Would that make you happy?" he asks.

"It would bring me great joy to see you free, and uninhibited," Hannibal replies honestly. "To see what you could create for me, and know that I had some part to play in overcoming your shame, and join you in your darkness. Yes, I think it would make me very happy."

Will lets out a quiet purr. "I want to," he whispers. He shifts his weight and spreads his legs for Hannibal once more, biting his lower lip as his eyelids flutter, his heat washing through him again. Hannibal shivers when Will pulls him close, offering up his body and his neck and his heart for Hannibal's consumption. "But I want this to be my first creation. Your child. I want to create for you."

"In my image," Hannibal breathes, cupping Will's thighs so he can force Will to bend, exposing his most vulnerable place. He kisses Will before Will can answer and Will moans, frantic, his nails digging into Hannibal's neck sharply.

"Please," Will gasps, becoming frantic. "I don't want my heat to fade except by your design."

"Anything for you, darling," Hannibal growls, and pushes into Will's slick, willing body once more. "Anything."

Hannibal mounts Will throughout the day, and when his final knot comes late into the evening, he catches it – the change in Will's scent. He presses his nose against Will's neck and breathes deeply, snarling in triumph. A pregnant Omega scent is not one he has smelled many times before, but he can mark the differences as Will's heat-scent starts to ebb. It is replaced with a bone-deep satisfaction, ocean breezes and salt in his lungs. It makes him thirsty, makes him want to roll Will onto his stomach and breed him all over again as soon as he smells it.

Will's eyes are bright, his smile lax and wide as he bares his bloody teeth. "What do you smell, Doctor Lecter?" he murmurs.

Hannibal growls, licking Will's neck and biting down hard enough to leave a pink mark behind. "A legacy," he murmurs. Of course, it's too soon to tell for sure if Will is pregnant, but the change in his scent is unmistakable – if Will's heat fades away and the change in his scent remains, Hannibal will have no doubt in his mind that he has successfully impregnated Will. Even now, tied and deeply sheathed in Will's body, his cock no longer hits that tender, hard place inside of him.

Will shivers, putting a hand on his dirty stomach when Hannibal pulls out of him. He sits up, breathing hard, his eyes bright with an eagerness still untouched. He kisses Hannibal, harsh and passionate, and Hannibal answers in kind, pressing Will back down onto the bed and covering him.

When Will's heat fades for good, his nesting instincts will kick in at a thousand miles an hour. He will become exhausted, prone to long periods of sleep, and will have no desire to do anything that would jeopardize his pregnancy.

Will hums when they part for air, tucking his nose under Hannibal's jaw. "I'll admit, I never thought this was possible for me," he murmurs.

"Nor did I," Hannibal replies. "The thought of family has always been like a distant lighthouse. Promising, but too far away."

"Lighthouses come with cliffs," Will murmurs. "Do not be too eager to rush to the shore. I fear you might capsize."

"Interesting, considering you have been so eager for me so far."

"Call it selfishness," Will says, smiling, his eyes heavy-lidded. He sighs, his jaw clenching as he tries to stifle his yawn.

Hannibal smiles. "Sleep, Will," he coaxes, petting through Will's hair and pulling him close. In truth he is exhausted as well – Omegas produce a hormone during their heat to lend their Alphas strength and stamina enough to satisfy them, and as it fades, so too does the adrenaline rush that had kept Hannibal awake and able to satisfy Will. "When you wake, you must call Alana and assure her that you're alright."

"She worries," Will murmurs. His eyes are already shut, and his words are slurred with exhaustion. He stifles another yawn and curls up closer against Hannibal's chest, letting his breath out in a warm, heavy sigh.

Hannibal smiles, and tucks his nose against Will's soft hair, breathing in deeply. Both of them are asleep within minutes.

Hannibal wakes and separates himself from Will's warmth, delighted when it seems that Will's heat is not due to resurface; he has been asleep for almost seven hours and Will's heat flashes had scarcely given him a breather between two. Which is a promising start.

He washes his face and hands, dresses, and goes downstairs to prepare breakfast. After a heat, an Omega must be given plenty of sugar, protein, and carbohydrates to help their bodies regain the calories burned out of them during their heat. Will's had been short, so he hadn't lost much, but Hannibal feels a protective, almost rabid need to tend to him now.

He slices up pineapple rings and sets them to one side, then pulls out ground dental student and flattens out the meat into patties to fry. He scrambles eggs with onions and green peppers, chips and fries some potatoes, and takes out a pitcher of apple juice and sets it on the kitchen counter.

Will emerges as Hannibal is finishing with the eggs and the meat. Hannibal can smell him, overpowering the scent of the food, and he turns his head when Will comes into view next to him, looking down dispassionately at the meat.

Will meets his gaze and smiles. Hannibal nods behind him to where the juice and pineapples are sitting. "Eat," he orders, and Will huffs and goes, sitting at a barstool and eating the pineapple by hand. Hannibal is glad he must keep his eyes on the food – he's sure the sight of Will's kiss-bruised lips sucking pineapple juice from his fingers would drive him to distraction.

"I think I realize why you were so defensive about your cooking," Will says after a moment. "You put much more time and effort into it than the average Alpha."

"I've always understood the kitchen to be the Omega's domain," Hannibal replies, scooping out the egg scramble onto two plates and filling in the space with the meat patties. He takes out two forks and turns, setting one plate and fork in front of Will. He sets his own plate and fork down, grabs two glasses, and pours them each a glass of juice.

Will hums, idly toying with the eggs with the tines of his fork. He takes a bite.

"A territory I sense you would be loathe to surrender," he purrs. His eyes shine beautifully, contrasting wonderfully with the pink and red marks on his neck, as well as darker bruising around his mating bite and from Hannibal's hands. He looked thoroughly ravished. Hannibal likes him like this.

"Do you want to cook for me?" Hannibal asks, raising an eyebrow as he takes a seat at the second stool and begins to eat.

Will huffs a laugh, shaking his head. "No," he replies. His leg swings out, touching his knee to Hannibal's thigh, and Hannibal smiles.

Hannibal watches as Will turns his attention to the meat. Now that he knows Will knows, it's so much more satisfying to watch him eat. Bedelia would never stomach anything other than the fish that he prepared for her, knowing the source of Hannibal's main food supply. Will slices off a bite with the edge of his fork and Hannibal can't help purring as he watches Will eat it, swallowing without hesitation.

Will catches his eye and smiles knowingly. "You are eager to satisfy my hunger," he says.

Hannibal nods.

"And what of you, Doctor Lecter?" Will asks. "What are you hungry for?"

"Right at this moment?" Hannibal asks, and Will shrugs one shoulder. "You."

Will laughs, scooping up some eggs onto his fork and eating them with another mouthful of meat. "You have a silver tongue," he teases. "Do you want to control me?"

"I've said before, I do not want that," Hannibal replies. "I wish to see you freed. Of shame, and guilt, and despair."

"Ah, but now we have put our stars in the same alignment," Will says, tilting his head towards Hannibal again. "We're conjoined. I wonder if either of us could survive separation."

Hannibal frowns. "Separation?" he repeats.

"My desires draw me in many different directions," Will continues, meeting Hannibal's eyes and holding his gaze steadily. Hannibal can see the predator behind his mask, the delightfully dark creature that Will had shown him in the throes of his heat. He wants to draw it out, crouch in the darkness with his hand extended.

Here kitty kitty, come out and play.

"If you had not told me the truth, I would have continued to hunt the creature that lingers on the edges of Jack's nightmares. The Ripper is never asleep in his mind, but always watching; always waiting. I don't want to work for him anymore, but the righteous, selfish part of me wants to keep hunting killers. The world is so much clearer through their eyes."

"You can do both," Hannibal says, smiling. "I know how to evade men like Jack."

Will smiles. "Your emotions cloud your judgement," he says, reaching forward to put a hand on Hannibal's bared forearm. "I know you can see the same future as I do; one full of sun and children and joy. And I want that. But I cannot achieve that with Jack's shadow lingering over me." He sighs, pulling back again, and turns his attention back to his food. "And neither can you."

"If Jack's employment troubles you so much, leave it," Hannibal says. "I have money and means; we can leave this city. This country, if you want to. I could show you France, or Italy, or England. Anywhere you wanted to go."

Will swallows, his jaw clenching. "I can't leave Morgan," he whispers.

Hannibal sighs, looking down at his plate. "I understand," he replies.

Will swallows loudly enough that Hannibal hears his throat click. "You must think I'm cruel," he says, and Hannibal turns to regard him again. Will's eyes flash his way, then drop. "You offer me freedom, and sanctuary, and I will not offer you the same."

"I do not resent your attachment to your son," Hannibal murmurs. "You love him very much. And his mother."

Will sighs. "You must understand," he says. "Alana would know something was wrong if I just packed up and left. She knows I would never leave Morgan or her without a word. She would worry, and grow suspicious. Your ex-wife might as well. And if they got to talking…"

"You think Bedelia would betray me?" Hannibal asks.

"I really can't say, one way or the other," Will says, somewhat coldly. "Do you trust her?"

"With my life," Hannibal replies.

"And with mine?" Will presses. "With our child's?"

"I'm not sure what you want me to say here, darling," Hannibal says.

"I don't know," Will says, sighing. He sets his fork down and rubs a hand over his face. "Like I said – I feel as though I'm being pulled in so many different directions at once. A man cannot have two masters, and I have many."

"Perhaps we could persuade Alana and Margot to come with us," Hannibal says, softly, testing the words before he gives them life. Bedelia-like. "They know your secrets, Will, or at least enough of them. They would know you wouldn't leave the country lightly."

"I can't ask that," Will says.

Hannibal sighs, and reaches out to flatten his hand on Will's thigh, squeezing gently. "I know."

"This feels like a house of cards," Will says. "Remove one, and the whole piece will crumble. I cannot be rid of Jack. I need to know what he knows, see what he sees. I need to be there in case he ever catches your scent."

Hannibal smiles, touched at Will's protectiveness.

Will huffs, shaking his head, and finishes his plate with one more bite. He pushes the plate to one side and drags the bowl of pineapple chunks close to him, spearing one and raising it to his lips. "Whatever you decide, Will, know that I support you wholeheartedly. We are on the same path, now, wherever that may lead."

Will smiles. He eats the pineapple chunk and sets his fork down, pushing himself to his feet. He takes Hannibal's hands in both of his own and leans in for a kiss and Hannibal meets him, licking the sweet fruit from his tongue.

Will pulls back with a shiver, resting their foreheads together. "I need to call Alana," he says.

He doesn't move. Hannibal smiles and cups his face, stroking his thumbs over Will's flushed cheeks. Though his heat is over, the scent of it lingers like the aftertaste of sweet wine. Hannibal breathes it in greedily.

"Your phone is right there," he says, nodding to where Will's cell phone sits, on the kitchen counter where Hannibal left it.

Will smiles. "Later," he says, biting his lower lip. He pulls Hannibal to his feet and presses close to his chest, stealing another kiss.

Hannibal smiles, pulling Will close. "Later is good."

Hannibal joins Will at the next crime scene. He's giddy with anticipation, waiting to see what his lovely mate makes of his latest creation.

Will seems just as eager to see it. He pushes past Jack, hardly paying attention to his briefing of the time of death, when the body was found, the victim's name. They are all paltry details. And ones Will already knows.

He passes through the crowd of forensic analysts, photographers, and medical examiners, and comes to a stop at the display.

Eva Kingsley had been a hard woman to track down, but Hannibal knows his efforts will not go unappreciated.

"We found her DNA at the Turner crime scene," Jack says grimly. "She had three young boys with her, including Jesse Turner. The youngest was taken from his home this time last year."

Will swallows, looking up at the woman. Hannibal had gutted her from collarbone to uterus, and planted flowers in her chest. Her hands are bound to the beams of a doorframe, without a wall to support it. Her feet are curled and tucked up, sewn to her stomach so the flowers fall out around her knees. Her eyes are closed, her face set into a benevolent smile. There are claw and teeth marks in her neck – old ones. Apparently at one point she had been mated.

"This is the women whose family values we saw at the Turner house?" Will asks darkly.

Jack nods.

Will steps forward, his hands covered in latex gloves, and he touches one of the flower petals gently. The flowers have already begun to rot, despite the nutrient-rich place holder for them. Symbolic of the family values Will had seen so ungraciously perverted.

Will looks over his shoulder at Hannibal, his expression dark and pleased. Hannibal smiles at him, and then his cell phone rings.

He turns and walks away to answer it. It's Bedelia. "Good morning," he greets.

"What did you do?" she demands in answer.

Hannibal frowns. He turns to see Will in deep conversation with Jack, and growls in frustration that he isn't getting to see Will so eagerly take his tribute apart. "What do you mean?" he asks.

"Anthony is missing," Bedelia hisses. "He didn't come home last night."

Hannibal blinks. "I assure you I had nothing to do with it," he replies coolly.

"Don't lie to me, Hannibal."

"I assure you, my love, I would not lie about something like this," Hannibal says, troubled despite himself. It's not often he is taken off guard like this, and he doesn't like the idea of one of his pseudo-prey animals going missing so abruptly. "When did you last see him?"

"Yesterday," Bedelia says. "I haven't seen him since noon." So, the afternoon and night time, he has been unaccounted for. The same time in which Hannibal was away, constructing his own design.

"Bedelia, I swear, I had nothing to do with it," Hannibal says firmly. He looks up again and sees that Will and Jack haven't moved, but Will is looking at him now, his brow furrowed with concern. Hannibal offers him a tight smile and turns away, so Will cannot see his face. "I promised I would not bother either of you and that fact remains true."

"And what about your new lover?" Bedelia says sharply. "Can you promise the same of him?"

"Will has not left my side since dinner," Hannibal says, bristling at the accusation.

"You had better hope he comes home," she says. "I will never forgive you, otherwise."

"I'm sure he'll turn up," Hannibal replies. Then he straightens, hearing Jack and Will approaching. "I will call you later."

He hangs up and turns to greet Will and Jack. Jack looks deeply troubled, and his eyes are on Will's neck, darting between his and Hannibal's like he can see a physical chain connecting them. Hannibal smiles despite himself, pleased at Jack's obvious displeasure. Will isn't wearing anything to hide his scent or his neck and as a result the air reeks of satisfied, mated Omega.

"Someone decided to take matters into their own hands," Jack says darkly.

"Or the boys got tired of their mother playing God," Will replies smoothly.

Jack looks at him. "You think children did this?"

Will smiles. "It's never too early to start defending yourself, Jack."

Hannibal thinks of Will, sixteen and a killer already, and his smile widens.

Jack dismisses them with a rough growl, and Will leads Hannibal to his car. They had parked a little way away and so the area is relatively private – a fact that Will seems to notice just as he does, as he pushes himself up against Hannibal's chest, flat against the car, and kisses him breathlessly.

"It was beautiful," he says, his eyes shining as he cups Hannibal's face. "How did you find her?"

"I thought about what you said," Hannibal says, "and I realized that the mother was stealing unwanted Omega children. Which would have meant specific prescriptions to give them the strength and training needed to overcome their natural bonds to their own families. Testosterone, target practice, strength training hormones. Everything you said your own mother did for you."

Will blinks at him, pleased and proud at Hannibal's deduction.

"It wasn't difficult to find a pattern," Hannibal says. "I called in a favor, found a trail of prescriptions around the times of the abductions and the family homes. Then I followed my nose."

"And you found her," Will breathes. His fingers curl in Hannibal's coat, white-knuckled and shaking. "You found her because of me. Thank you, Hannibal."

He kisses Hannibal again, deep and passionate, cupping Hannibal's neck. Hannibal can smell how happy and pleased Will is, feel his eagerness with how Will touches him. If he didn't know any better, he'd say that he's *aroused* at the sight of Hannibal's creation.

"Will," Hannibal growls, pushing Will back with what feels like more effort than it would take to move a mountain. Will whines, biting his lower lip, his eyes bright and gold. "Will, I must ask -." He swallows, and Will blinks, stepping back and tilting his head to one side. "I was gone for a long time yesterday."

Will nods, lowering his gaze. "I know," he says.

"Bedelia called me," Hannibal continues. "She told me Anthony has been missing since yesterday morning."

Will's eyes flash, skirt to one side. He bites his lower lip.

"Will," Hannibal whispers, hardly daring to believe. He reaches out and cups Will's face, forcing his eyes up. "What did you do?"

Will swallows. "He came to the house," he whispers, letting go of Hannibal's coat.

"What?" Hannibal demands.

Will clenches his jaw, his eyes rising to meet Hannibal's again. Then they move away, to the crime scene beyond. "We can't talk about this here," he says.

"No," Hannibal growls. "You will tell me what happened. *Now*."

Will flinches, whining when he hears Hannibal's Voice. Hannibal immediately drops his hand, appalled at himself for causing such a reaction in his mate. Will sucks in an unsteady breath and his eyes are wide when they meet Hannibal's again.

"I'm sorry," Hannibal whispers, stepping forward and cupping Will's face. "I'm not angry at you, my dear. I swear. But, please, you must tell me what happened."

"He – he came to the house," Will says again, shivering. He flattens his hands on Hannibal's chest and lets out a soft, plaintive whine, one of the ones designed to tug on an Alpha's instinct to show mercy. "He came to warn me. He knew what you were, what you had done. He was hysterical."

"What did you do, Will?" Hannibal whispers.

"What I had to," Will growls, baring his teeth. "I did what I had to."

Hannibal closes his eyes, taking in a deep breath. "Is he still alive?"

Will nods. "I didn't hurt him," he says. "I know how much he means to you."

The way he says it jars something in Hannibal – it's jealous, dark. Will's eyes have that predatory light to them.

"We must go home immediately," Hannibal says, and Will nods, climbing into the car as Hannibal circles around to the driver side. "Perhaps I can convince him this was all a misunderstanding."

"I locked him in the basement," Will says. "Not sure how you can explain that away."

"I'll think of something," Hannibal replies.

"And if you can't?"

Hannibal stifles a growl. "Then we will do what needs to be done," he says. "I fear you may have forced our hand here, darling. For someone who was so concerned about Bedelia and Anthony revealing our secrets, I'm surprised at your rash behavior."

"He would have told someone else, if not me," Will replies defensively. "I won't let any harm come to you."

Hannibal sighs, unable to stop himself smiling, warm in the chest at Will's fierce protective streak. He reaches out and laces his fingers through Will's, squeezing gently. "We'll deal with whatever happens," he says. "Together."

Will lets out a quiet, desperate sound of relief. "Thank you," he says.

Hannibal raises his knuckles and kisses them, veering out onto the highway and speeding towards his home.

Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

> This story will NOT go Mizumono-esque. I tell you that now because you're going to think it and I promise it won't.

Hannibal parks in front of his house and sighs, squeezing Will's fingers gently. Will smells like a mess of anxiety next to him, unsure and worried for what they both know Hannibal will find in his house. Anthony's car is parked outside.

"You must tell me everything he said," Hannibal says.

Will presses his lips together, whining softly. "He was frantic," he says. "At first, he didn't explain, he just came to me and was trying to get me to leave the house with him. When I demanded to know why, he told me Bedelia told him that you hurt people. That you're a killer."

Hannibal sighs, letting go of Will's hand to rub his palm over his mouth. "Then what happened?"

"I denied it, of course," Will says. "I told him he couldn't believe that, that he couldn't possibly believe you would do such terrible things. I couldn't change his mind, no matter what I said. He just kept insisting that I left with him, where Bedelia and he could keep me safe. Then we'd go to the police. So, I pretended to agree and said I'd go pack, and I knocked him out when his back was turned and tied him up in the basement."

"And you didn't feel the need to tell me any of this?" Hannibal asks. "We have spent the entire day together, from early this morning, and it never occurred to you to tell me you have my ex-wife's lover trapped in the basement?"

He looks at Will and Will bites his lower lip, curled up in his seat, his eyes downcast and his fingers drumming anxiously against his thighs. "I didn't know what to do," he says. "I knew Bedelia would check here first if he went missing. I knew she'd blame you and accuse you of hurting him."

"That die has already been cast," Hannibal says sternly. "She suspects me. And when I denied it, she accused you."

Will's eyes flash and his upper lip curls in a brief snarl. "Well, she has good instincts, I'll give her that," he replies softly.

"Anthony will likely panic when he wakes up, if he hasn't already," Hannibal murmurs. "If I were the first thing he saw, he would not react well."

Will hums. "Perhaps I can try and change his mind," he says. "I'll tell him I was scared, and I panicked, but that he's wrong. He might believe me."

"Would you believe someone whose mate you accused of murder, who then knocked you out and locked you in a basement?" Hannibal asks coolly.

Will huffs. "No," he replies, shaking his head. He heaves an unsteady breath and wipes his hands over his face. "I'm so sorry. I didn't know what to do."

"It will give me no pleasure to kill Anthony," Hannibal murmurs. "But we may have to."

"Let me try," Will says quietly. "I can…I can try."

Hannibal nods. "Very well," he says, and gets out of the car. Will follows suit and they hurry into his home, Hannibal closing and locking the door behind him. "I will remain in the kitchen, so I can hear if he tries to run. If he runs, darling, you must let him. I'll take care of it, and I wouldn't want you to get hurt."

Will lets out a quiet, sweet whine, and catches Hannibal by the coat sleeve, pulling him to a halt. He cups Hannibal's face and kisses him, whimpering when Hannibal responds in kind, unable to help the sweet call of Will's lingering heat-scent and the softness of his mouth. "No matter what you hear," Will breathes, his eyes shining, "it's just for the sake of the lie. I'm going to protect you."

Hannibal blinks at him, wondering what Will might possibly say. But he gives an accepting nod and kisses Will again, cupping the nape of his tender neck. Will shivers, arching against his chest, and steals one more kiss. "Good luck, darling," he murmurs.

Will smiles and goes to the kitchen. He lifts up the floorboards to expose the stairs down to the basement, and Hannibal remains upstairs. He can hear Anthony below, whimpering in fear.

Will catches his eye, smiles, and disappears downstairs.

"Anthony," he hears Will say, a harsh stage-whisper that he can just catch. Anthony makes another low noise and Hannibal knows Will is creeping closer. "Shh, you must be quiet."

He hears Anthony try to speak, his voice muffled like he's been gagged. Then Will must free his mouth, because he hears Anthony gasp, and then his voice; "What in God's name are you playing at?"

"I'm sorry," Will says, and Hannibal must give him credit – he certainly sounds believable enough. He sounds scared and panicked. "I can explain."

"What is this place? How long have I been here?"

"Shut *up*," Will snarls, his Voice echoing up the stairs. Hannibal shivers, hearing it, and Anthony gasps. "I had to take you down here, otherwise he would have found you. You want to get caught?"

"What do you mean?"

"Listen," Will begins, and Hannibal hears the meat hooks clinking against the ceiling as Will unties Anthony. "I work for the FBI, okay? And we've had our eyes on Doctor Lecter for a long time." Hannibal blinks, cocking his head to one side, and prowls closer to the entrance so he can hear better. "I know what you suspect, but until we have proof, we can't arrest him. I need more time, and you coming in here when he might have been home could have jeopardized the whole damn thing."

Anthony whines, and Hannibal's fingers curl. He moves away from the entrance as he hears Will's voice getting louder. Will leads Anthony to the bottom of the stairs, but they don't come up yet. "You need to keep your damn mouth shut," Will hisses. "I'm sorry I hurt you, but you forced my hand. You mustn't tell anyone what happened here."

"I won't," Anthony replies softly. Then; "But it's true? He's the Chesapeake Ripper?"

Hannibal hears Will pause. "I believe so," he finally says. "And I'm going to catch him, and put him away, but I can't have you rushing in here and making him suspect me. You and Bedelia could get hurt."

"I don't understand, Will," Anthony says.

"When I have proof, I'm going to tell my superiors what I've seen, and I'm going to get him arrested. He's guilty, I know he is, but I won't risk this case getting thrown out on something circumstantial. So, you need to be quiet – when he's arrested, you might be called as witnesses. You and Bedelia. Would you testify against him?"

"I can't believe this," Anthony says. "How can you mate with him, knowing he's a killer?"

Will huffs. "Trust me, Anthony, there is very little I would do to put someone like the Ripper away," he says. Then he pauses. "We must hurry," he adds, and Hannibal leaves the house quickly, knowing that Anthony will see his car parked outside. He gets in and pulls away, driving out to the nearest light and then circling around to the back entrance of his housing complex. When he returns, Anthony's car is gone, and he parks again and hurries inside.

Will comes out of the dining room, his worried frown melting into a relieved smile when he sees Hannibal. "Where did you go?" he asks, going to him.

"I drove around so Anthony wouldn't see my car," Hannibal says. "Do you think you've convinced him?"

Will hums. "How much did you hear?"

"Enough to know that you are a very good liar," Hannibal replies coolly, leading the way into the dining room. He takes a seat at the head of the table and Will sits on his right-hand side and makes a curious sound. "I wonder if there's a seed of truth in what you told him."

Will huffs a laugh. "Well, I do work for the FBI," he says. "That wasn't a lie."

"The best ruses are born out of truth," Hannibal murmurs, resting one elbow on the armrest and turning to face Will. Will meets his eyes steadily, sitting lax in his own chair, the picture of comfort. "Is there a possibility, however small, that you are lying to me, and not Anthony?"

Will blinks, before he huffs a strained laugh. "Doctor Lecter," he says, rolling his eyes, "for that to be true, that would mean Alana and Margot would have had to be in on it as well. They're the ones that introduced us. And it would mean your wife's infertility was by design, so that you were forced to choose a surrogate. And that other Omegas would have had to deliberately be rejected by you, to make way for me."

Hannibal supposes that is true. "But you said you have hunted people like me," he says, and Will bites his lower lip, nodding. "Now that you've found me, your instincts pull you in different directions. You have said so yourself. Jack has been a pack Alpha for you for a long time. I can't be certain where your loyalties lie."

Will shifts his weight, frowning. "I told you I would have to lie to Anthony," he says. "Why does that lie trouble you so much?"

"Because it might be true, Will," Hannibal replies.

"It had to be convincing," Will says. "Do you want me to kill him? I would leave right now, hunt him and Bedelia down and rip out their throats this instant if you asked it of me."

Hannibal hums, smiling despite himself. "Would you really?" he murmurs, and Will nods.

"If I wanted to trap you, Doctor Lecter, I would have done so before my heat. Before I had your child in my belly."

"Ah, but I didn't confess until you were in heat. And this way, you get to have both," Hannibal replies. "You get a child that would be wholly yours, with no interference from me, or Bedelia, or anyone else. A legacy all your own."

Will swallows back a growl, baring his teeth. "If I'd have known my loyalty would be called into question, I wouldn't have argued for Anthony's life," he bites out. Hannibal's eyebrows rise. "His safety isn't worth your trust in me, or lack thereof."

Hannibal hums, regarding Will for a long time. Will's eyes are dark, the gold in them shadowed with anger. Will cannot keep eye contact forever, and his gaze drops after another moment, his shoulders losing their tension as he sighs.

"What should I have done?" he whispers, shaking his head. His hands rest on the edges of the table, fingers curling to whiten his knuckles. "What lie should I have told him, that would have convinced him? That you were innocent? He saw the basement, Doctor Lecter, and he would trust Bedelia's words more than mine or yours. The only way I could calm him down was to convince him that I knew what I was doing."

"Oh, I have no doubt that you know what you're doing," Hannibal replies quietly. "In all things."

"I didn't even know what you were, or *who* you were, until you told me," Will says. "All I knew is that you saw the world as I see it – there is a darkness in you that I'm drawn to, that haunts me when I dream. I am called to it like a current in the ocean. Even with what I know now, do you think my trust and my faith are so easily won?"

After another moment, Hannibal sighs. "No," he says, straightening up, and he reaches out and folds his hand over one of Will's, smoothing his fingers along Will's knuckles. Will's eyes snap to him, bright and wide and hopeful. "No, darling. I have no doubt."

"I'll leave," Will says. "I'll drop everything and leave with you, wherever you want to go. As long as I can visit Morgan, and Alana and Margot. As long as I'm free, I'll go wherever you tell me to go."

Hannibal blinks. "I would believe it," he says, "if I didn't already know that's not what you want."

Will lets out a quiet, plaintive whine. "Please," he says, and turns his hand to lace his fingers in Hannibal's. "Tell me how I can prove to you that I want you. That I'm faithful."

Hannibal smiles gently, squeezing Will's fingers.

"Part of me wants to leave," Will says quietly. "It wants to run away with you. But another part of me will always be loyal to Alana. To Morgan. I couldn't bear seeing her suffer, or knowing that I had made her suffer."

"Your loyalty to her is admirable," Hannibal replies. "I wonder…"

He pauses, and Will meets his eyes again. "Yes?" he asks.

Hannibal stands, letting go of Will's hand, and moves to the kitchen. Will follows after a second and Hannibal goes to the knife block, taking out a long, thin knife, serrated on one side for slicing loaves of bread. Will freezes when he sees it, his breath catching.

"You told me that if any part of you offends me, I should cut it out and throw it away," Hannibal says, meeting Will's eyes.

Will nods, his gaze dropping to the knife. He looks tense, but not afraid. "I will not have a traitor bear my child," Hannibal continues. "If I were to find out any part of what you told Anthony is true, I would not tolerate it for a second, darling."

Will swallows harshly, taking a step back. He cups a hand over his stomach and Hannibal watches as his jaw clenches, his eyes flash. Fiercely protective of his offspring, as any Omega would be. "Yes," he says, finally, his voice hoarse.

"Tell me, Will," Hannibal says, and lets a little of his Voice come through, so that he knows whatever Will says will be the truth; "Honestly. Where do your loyalties lie?"

Will shivers, his shoulders rolling. He meets Hannibal's gaze, that predatory light shining in them again. "With myself," he growls. "I'm selfish, Doctor Lecter, just as you are. If you tried to harm our child I would stop you."

Our child. Hannibal smiles. "Well, at least you're being honest with me, now," he says, and sets the knife down. Will's shoulders drop as soon as he does it, relaxing visibly. "I'm sorry, Will," he adds, not approaching his mate, as he knows and recognizes the anger in Will's eyes. "I had to be sure."

Will nods, once, sharply. He works his jaw to one side and breathes out harshly through his nose. "I'm going to go home," he says. "I need to check on my dogs. And I think a bit of distance would be good for both of us."

Hannibal nods, fighting the urge to compel Will to stay. He had promised he would never force Will to do anything, and he meant it. Will straightens up, and heads towards the door. Hannibal follows, and Will takes his coat, shrugging it back on, and fixes Hannibal with one more sharp look.

"Drive safely," Hannibal murmurs, opening the door for Will. Will clenches his jaw, nodding once more, and leaves without another word.

Hannibal watches him go to his car, and sighs, closing the door and resting his forehead against the wood. He closes his eyes, swallowing back the strange feeling of loss and emptiness sitting in his chest.

What has he done? He goes back to the kitchen and puts the knife back in its place, before he braces his hands on the counter and heaves a ragged breath. The entire place stinks of Will and he sighs, shaking his head.

He lifts his head when he hears his cell phone ringing, and fishes it out of the pocket of his coat. It's Bedelia, and he growls, debating not answering for a moment.

"Hello," he says, answering after the sixth ring.

"Anthony just called me," Bedelia says. "He's coming home."

"Good," Hannibal replies, trying to swallow past the tightness in his throat.

"You don't sound surprised," Bedelia murmurs airily.

"Should I be?" Hannibal replies. "I can't imagine anyone who would want to do him harm."

She hums. "I can," she says tightly. "He sounded very shaken."

"I'm sure all he needs is some rest, and the love of a good woman," Hannibal says coolly. She hums. ""I do believe I'm owed an apology; you seemed very certain that I had been the one to cause him harm, when that is clearly not the case."

"I suppose that remains to be seen," Bedelia says. Her tone turns cold. "I know exactly why he went missing, Hannibal. I'm not a fool. He and I are going to leave the country. We're moving back to Italy."

"Fresh mate, fresh start," Hannibal says. "I wish you all the best."

"I'm sure," she says. "Goodbye, Hannibal."

"Goodbye," he replies, and hangs up the phone. He turns to his messages and texts Will's number; 'Bedelia and Anthony are moving to Italy.'

He doesn't receive a response, which makes sense, if Will is driving Hannibal doesn't want him to be distracted. He can't help but worry, and hopes that whatever Will is thinking, he's being safe. The thought of Will avoiding him is an uncomfortable one. Hannibal has studied enough about Omega and Alpha psychology to know what kind of bonds form between mates; codependence, hormonal bonds, a change in their nature to totally consume them with their need to satisfy and care for their mates. It is the deepest kind of love, felt in both Alphas and Omegas alike with their respective partners.

Will may have lied. He may have been lying the entire time. Hannibal can't be sure, but he must admit Will is right – the circumstances leading up to their introduction, courtship, and mating are full of far too many variables to have been someone's design. But if Will knows Hannibal's true nature, there's nothing stopping him from telling Jack, or someone in the FBI. They might investigate Hannibal. They will surely arrest him if they get a warrant, and as Hannibal's mate, Will has the authority to allow them to search the house.

He must make preparations, one way or the other. Will has forced his hand, but Hannibal will not let himself be caught.

Alana calls him a little before five in the evening. Hannibal hasn't heard from Will all day, and he swallows down his worry as best he can. "Good evening, Alana," he greets.

"Hannibal," Alana breathes, and she sounds terribly upset. Hannibal feels the worry skyrocket abruptly. "Is everything alright? I've been calling and texting Will all day and haven't heard from him."

"I saw him this morning," Hannibal says. "We visited a crime scene together, and then he went home to care for his animals. I haven't heard from him since."

"…He said he was coming home?" Alana says, and Hannibal gives a hum of acknowledgement. "Hannibal, I've been at his house since one. He hasn't been here."

Hannibal frowns. "Are you sure?"

"Yes," Alana replies. "Margot showed me the blood bags in his barn. They've been shredded, poured out all over the place. Did you know about them?"

"Yes," Hannibal says. "He showed me shortly before we mated."

"I don't know what happened," Alana says. "Nothing of his is missing from what I can tell. The dogs are all here – they were hungry and had to go outside but they looked fine enough. Just the blood, God, there was so much. Where is he?"

"I don't know," Hannibal replies, the anxiety turning sharp and cold in his chest now. It feels like he can't see straight, the Alpha red in his eyes is blinding him and making his head feel hot. "I'll try to call him. Stay at his home; he may still return."

"Please update me as soon as you can," Alana says. "I'd die if anything happened to him."

"I assure you, I'll find him," Hannibal replies, and hangs up the phone. Before he can call Will, his phone starts ringing, and Will's name flashes across the screen. Hannibal lets out a broken sound of relief and answers. "Will. Where are you?"

"Jack called me," Will snarls. He sounds completely, viscerally angry. Hannibal can imagine him pacing, wherever he is, hackles raised, and teeth bared, eyes shining gold. "That fucking rat told him everything. He's coming for you, Doctor Lecter."

"Where are you?" Hannibal demands. "Come home, darling. Please."

"No," Will replies sharply. Hannibal hears something in the background – it sounds like someone moaning in pain. A sound he is intimately familiar with. "Not until I'm done here. You have to leave."

"Where are you?"

"There's an eight o'clock flight out of D.C. to Paris. You need to be on it. I'll meet you there."

"Will? Will!" But he has hung up, and when Hannibal tries to call him back, it goes straight to voicemail. "Damn it!" he snarls, clenching the phone tightly in his hand.

Then what Will told him catches up to him. Jack is on his way here. Jack knows everything. He's coming for Hannibal. Hannibal growls, rushing upstairs to retrieve his and Will's go bag, containing clothes, passports, and enough money to get them wherever they need to be. It's a situation he has been prepared for, for a long time. At first the bags had been for him and Bedelia, but swapping her presence out for Will's had been easy enough.

He tries to call Will again as he loads his bags. The phone rings, but Will doesn't answer. "Where are you, Will?" he whispers. But, of course, he suspects where Will is. The whimper of distress that he had heard over the phone is one he had heard not even hours before.

He closes the car and heads back inside to grab his coat and wallet, and freezes when there's a knock on the door.

"Doctor Lecter?" It's Jack's voice – how in the world did he get here so quickly?

Unless Will waited to call him.

Hannibal closes his eyes, sighing. Of course, it would look worse if Hannibal was in the midst of fleeing. He goes downstairs and answers the door. "Agent Crawford," he says mildly, gesturing for him to come inside. Jack looks like he came alone – foolish. Or confident. "This is a surprise."

Or Will knows Jack doesn't know anything. He's forcing Hannibal's hand, just as he forced it before. Hannibal doesn't know what to think.

Jack goes into his kitchen and Hannibal follows. "Can I offer you something to drink?"

"No, thank you," Jack replies. He looks more or less at ease, nothing about his demeanor to suggest any ill will. "I wanted to speak to you, Alpha to Alpha, if I may." Hannibal cocks his head to one side. "Is Will here?"

Hannibal shakes his head. "I haven't seen him since this morning," he replies.

Jack nods, his face grim. "I want you to answer me honestly," he says, and Hannibal nods again. "Did you mate with him?"

Hannibal sighs, turning to retrieve a bottle of white wine from the fridge. He opens it and pours himself a glass. "I did," he replies, and raises his eyes to meet Jack's. "Is that what you wanted to talk about?"

"I can't imagine you've known Will long," Jack says mildly. "You don't seem like the kind of man to rush into relationships with someone you've barely met."

"I found a kindred spirit in Will," Hannibal replies. "You told me once you only needed to see your wife to want to marry her." Jack smiles fondly, nodding. "Is it so hard to believe I am capable of the same kind of attachment?"

Jack huffs. "I suppose not," he replies. Hannibal resists the urge to check his watch – the longer he delays, the higher a chance he will miss the flight, or not meet Will at the airport. Now that he knows Will is okay, but clearly in the kind of mindset Hannibal has only glimpsed, he is all the more worried for his mate. The possibility of Will's betrayal is a mediocre sting compared with the possibility that Hannibal is wrong, and Will is loyal, and he may ruin everything if he's not on that plane.

"If your intention was to come here and scold me for my relationship with Will, I'd suggest there are better ways to spend your time," Hannibal says mildly, taking a sip of his wine. "We're both consenting adults, and you are not his legal guardian."

"That’s true," Jack says, "but I look at Will like a son. I'm protective of him. I'd hate for anything to happen to him that would harm him."

"Or harm his ability to work for you?" Hannibal says smoothly. Jack frowns, and Hannibal smiles. "I'm afraid I have some bad news for you, Jack; Will very likely is already pregnant with my child. I doubt once his maternal instincts kick in that he will want to continue such gruesome work as the kind you put on his shoulders."

Jack hums. "And I'm sure you played your part in convincing him of that," he says.

"I assure you, Jack, I did no such thing."

Jack hums again. "I've heard some very disturbing rumors about you, Doctor Lecter," he says. Hannibal raises an eyebrow and cocks his head to one side. "Rumors that, if true, could mean

very bad things. For you, and for Will."

He takes a step forward, grabbing the bottle of wine. Hannibal lifts his chin and sets his glass down. "What kind of rumors would those be?" he asks, trying to keep his voice neutral.

"I'm sure it's nothing," Jack says with a genial smile. He circles the kitchen island until he's standing right at the part of the floorboards that open to the basement entrance. "Just some boy with a too-big mouth and too much imagination. You know how Omegas are."

He smiles at Hannibal, and holds the wine bottle upside-down so it goes pouring out onto the floor. Hannibal lets out his breath slowly as he watches Jack do it, and Jack's eyes fall to the floorboards. Some of the wine is leaking through the gaps.

Hannibal takes a knife from the block and slowly paces around the other side of the kitchen island.

"What's in your basement, Doctor Lecter?"

Hannibal snarls, raising his knife to strike. Jack whirls around, knocking the bottle into his hand and Hannibal hisses as his knuckles sing with pain, but refuses to let go of the knife. Jack grabs for his gun and Hannibal takes his hand, twisting his wrist as the shot goes off, missing Hannibal's shoulder by a hair and embedding itself into the wall behind him.

Jack growls, jerking back, and Hannibal slashes widely with his knife, cutting Jack's shirt at the chest. He leaps forward, but the wine makes the floor slick and they both fall, Jack on his back and Hannibal braced on top of him.

Jack lands a punch to his cheek and Hannibal growls, his vision going white for a moment, and he hears Jack reaching for his gun. Hannibal rears back and tries to stab him through the neck and Jack catches him, struggling with gritted teeth and red eyes.

"Did you think I would be brought down so easily, Jack?" Hannibal growls.

Jack hisses at him, forgoing his hold with one hand to wrap his fingers around Hannibal's throat. Hannibal snarls, trying to breathe as best he can, and rests all his weight against the knife. Jack can't hold him back with one hand, and Hannibal has to make sure his strength gives out before Hannibal's airway does.

Jack grunts, releasing Hannibal's neck, and reaches for his gun. He grabs it and Hannibal has to forsake his hold to stop Jack planting a bullet between his eyes. The gun goes off and Hannibal's ears are ringing, he gets pushed to one side and slices savagely at Jack's leg, severing the Achilles' tendon.

Jack collapses, his eyes wide, and Hannibal grabs him, pulls him close by the tie, and shoves his knife through Jack's throat. Jack chokes, his eyes wide, and slumps to the ground, clutching at his throat. Hannibal snarls, kicking his gun away, his knuckles white on his knife.

He paces away, his eyes glowing red when he catches them in the reflection of the hallway mirror, his head and chest are burning. His teeth feel too large in his mouth, wanting to rip

Jack apart by the jugular and watch him bleed out with the wine on the floor.

But he doesn't have time. He tosses his knife to one side and grabs his coat, pulling it tight to cover his bloodstained clothes, and rushes to his car. He takes out his phone and sees he has a missed call from Will.

He calls Will as he peels away from his house, only receiving a modicum of relief when Will answers. "Where are you, darling?" he murmurs. "Please. Please tell me." His knuckles are white on the steering wheel, his heart pounding. He's desperate to know that Will is safe, to have him by his side and put his hands in Will's hair, press his mouth to Will's, listen to his heartbeat and his steady breathing and take in the scent of his sweet Omega.

"Hannibal," Will purrs. "Good. You're just in time." Hannibal growls, and Will is moving on the other side of the phone. He hears a door open, and a pained yelp. "Tell him what you told me," Will demands, his Voice thick.

Another whimper. The wet sound of something harsh hitting blood-wet skin. A woman's pained scream. "Tell him!" Will snarls.

"Will, please." It's Bedelia's voice. Will is at Bedelia's house. Hannibal clutches the phone more tightly and pulls off the highway, heading east instead of south. He has to get Will.

"Sweetheart, I'd love to stay and play, but I have a plane to catch," Will says.

"The police are on their way," Bedelia says coldly, her voice thick with tears. "Just leave. They'll catch you."

"Not until I get what I want," Will replies sharply. Hannibal winces when he hears something strike again. He imagines Will is beating them both bloody. He doesn't hear Anthony making any sound. "Now tell him what you confessed to me. Do it, and your boy here might just make it."

"I…Hannibal," Bedelia says. "Hannibal, I told them. I told the police everything."

Hannibal sighs, resisting the urge to close his eyes, since he's driving. The traffic is thick at this time of day and he has a hard time justifying the fact that he can't just drive up onto the shoulder and pass everyone.

"I thought you killed Anthony," Bedelia says. "So I told them. I thought they might catch you in time to save him. I'm sorry."

"I don't care if you're fucking *sorry*," Will snarls, and Bedelia makes a choked-off noise. The phone is close to her face – Hannibal can hear her ragged, tear-filled sobs and Will's low snarl. He imagines Will, his eyes blistering gold, his free hand wrapped around her throat. "I should have killed him. I should kill both of you right now."

"*Will*," Hannibal says, his Voice strong in his throat.

Will gasps, hearing it, and Bedelia's sobs grow faint. "Yes?"

"Don't," Hannibal murmurs. "I would much rather you get out of there before the police arrive."

Will growls. "But they -."

"Will, I'm on my way to you now. Stop this. Come outside and meet me, and we'll leave."

Will pauses, and then he lets out a low, plaintive whine. The kind Omegas make when words aren't enough. "…I can't," he replies. "No. I can't just let them get away with this. Whatever was necessary – that's what I promised you, and that's what you'll get."

"Will -."

"I'll see you later, Doctor Lecter," Will says coldly. "Goodbye."

He hangs up, and Hannibal snarls, throwing his phone into the passenger seat. He almost rear ends the car in front of him as he does a swift swerve into the next lane, pressing on the gas. At this point he's not sure if his main goal is stopping Will, or getting to him before the police do.

But Will hadn't betrayed him. He hadn't lied, and Hannibal had treated him so cruelly because of his suspicions. He will not allow Will to be taken, or captured. He'd rather die.

Hannibal pulls up at the end of Bedelia's street, and slams on his brakes. The red and blue flashing lights of police vehicles are already wrapped around the entrance to Bedelia's home. There is an ambulance, and a medical examiner's truck. Hannibal watches as a body gets wheeled out in a black plastic bag.

Then, he sees Will. Will has his hands cuffed in front of him, his face and clothes soaked with blood, his hands wet with it. Hannibal is too far away to see his eyes, see how golden they are, but he can see the satisfied smile on Will's face. He presses his lips together, eyeing the witnesses. Too many for him to storm in.

Will pauses at the side of the police car, lifting his head. Hannibal watches him scenting the air, frowning. He knows Will can feel his eyes on him – Omegas are always sensitive to that, and as his mate, Hannibal's gaze holds more power than anyone else's.

Will's eyes scan the street and stop when they land on Hannibal's car. Hannibal is sure Will cannot see his face – he's too far away and it's too dark. But Will smiles at him, fond and pleased, and lifts his hands just slightly, fingers curling in a little wave before one of the policemen take him by his hair and duck his head, forcing him into the back of the car.

Hannibal sucks in a breath, pulling away from the street before his presence is noticed. Will arranged for him to get out, to be free, and Hannibal cannot logically help him right now. There is no death penalty in Maryland and as a pregnant Omega, Hannibal is sure Will could spin a tale that would lend him sympathy during trial.

Hannibal cannot afford to be caught. Will made sure Hannibal could run, and Hannibal must run if he is to be able to save his mate in the future. Once they question Will, they will go to his home next, and they will find Jack, and possibly the basement as well. The evidence against Hannibal is damning, and he has no choice but to get out before they can catch him.

He speeds towards the airport and manages to catch the flight just in time. It is only when the wheels are up that he allows himself to let out a huge breath, pressing the side of his fist to his mouth and clenching his eyes tightly shut.

He feels raw, absolutely gutted from heart to stomach. Will had proven his loyalty and his love in the most beautiful way possible, and the last thing Hannibal told him was not to do it. After threatening and distrusting him, after treating him so cruelly, Will had still warned Hannibal about Jack, and made sure Hannibal was ready to flee.

Hannibal owes him absolutely everything. When he lands, he will ready himself with a new home and life for himself and Will, and do everything in his power to bring Will back to his side. Hannibal is not religious, and he doesn't turn to God now, but he thinks of Will, and hopes that Will's strength and power continue within him, so that he is ready when Hannibal comes home.

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

> *curses the fact that Hannibal's POV means I have to do strange shit to give insight into Will's trial*

Hannibal flees to Paris and immediately boards a flight to Rome. From Rome, to Athens, then from Athens, to Florence, trying to maintain calm long enough to think quickly and make it as difficult as possible for someone to find him. During his flight to Paris, he uses the airplane phone to call his accountant, telling him to liquidate as many assets as possible and transfer them to the fund from which his inheritance stemmed after his parents died. It is still under his name, but should be out of easy reach of the FBI.

Once that is done, he turns off his cell phone and discards it in the airport trash can in Athens.

He rents a hotel room in the outskirts of Florence and pays for a week in advance with the cash from his and Will's go bag after exchanging it at the airport to Euros. It will be enough for him to get his bearings and put all the necessary things in place for Will's rescue and return to him.

It is that night, as he closes the door and sets the bags down on the floor, that the weight of what has happened hits him, as heavy as the world sitting upon Atlas' shoulders. He collapses onto the bed, his elbows on his knees, his head in his hands. It is a sorrow and a loss he has not felt since Mischa, and yet it hits him just as keenly, or perhaps more so given that such a long time has passed between that moment and now.

Tears are in his eyes, his forehead aching sharply as he tries to swallow back the agony threatening to swallow him whole. Will's actions were the ultimate proof of his loyalty and love – both undeserved, especially after the way Hannibal treated him. He had been so cruel, to threaten Will's trust and his child, and for what? Some sneaking suspicion based off a lie Will said he would tell, to a man who had bedded Hannibal's wife for years and at the same time pretended to be his friend?

How foolish he'd been, blind in all the wrong places. And now Will is in the claws of the American justice system simply because he needed to protect Hannibal and their legacy. He will not be sentenced to death, Hannibal knows that, but a pregnant Omega might be forced to endure all manner of tortures in jail, or worse. He might lose the baby from stress. He might go feral and injure so many fellow inmates that the law is forced to make an exception.

Hannibal heaves an unsteady breath, rubbing absently at the tan line where his wedding finger lay. Brought down by the impulses of a woman and the fierce loyalty of an Omega. It is the kind of thing that spawns legends.

He knows sleep will elude him. He might never rest again until he has Will in his arms and Will's blood in his teeth, his heart beating steadily under Hannibal's hand. Each second drags by like nails in his back, each turn of the clock another lash to his bruised and numb spine. How might things have been different, if Hannibal hadn't allowed Will to leave? They could have fled together, under the cloak of night.

But Will could have been injured in the fight with Jack. He might have gone down in a rain of gunfire. He might have refused to leave, knowing that Morgan Verger remained in Maryland. All questions Hannibal will never know the answer to.

Hannibal rubs at his injured jaw, wincing and hissing through his teeth. It is then that he is aware of a vibrating sound, coming from Will's bag. He frowns, and stands, ripping the bag open and pressing his hand against the pile of clothes inside. He can feel something vibrating, and roots around until he sees the bright screen of a burner phone inside.

He does not recognize the number, but it's American. He answers it.

"You are receiving a collect call from the Maryland Correctional Adjustment Center. Caller is…" Hannibal pauses, and gasps when he hears Will's voice speaking his name. "Press one to accept the charges."

Hannibal almost drops the phone in his haste.

"Will?" he breathes.

"I'm here." Oh, God, the sound of Will's tired voice might as well be a symphony. Hannibal collapses to his knees, turning to press his back against the side of the bed. His free hand goes to his hair, shaking with relief. "Are you safe?"

"Yes," Hannibal replies.

"Don't tell me where you are," Will murmurs. Hannibal presses his lips together, closing his eyes, the treacherous tears he had held back no longer obeying his command to dry, and running down his cheeks instead. "I don't have long. I needed to hear your voice. I'm glad I waited long enough that you might answer."

"Is this your one phone call?" Hannibal asks, and hears Will's hum of confirmation. "You should be calling a lawyer."

"What for?" Will laughs. "I was literally caught red-handed. I will not plead innocence."

"They can reduce your sentence. Make it easier for you."

Will hums. "You underestimate me," he says. "Again."

"I'm so sorry," Hannibal whispers, unable to stop his voice from shaking. "I treated you monstrously. I drove you to this."

"You didn't compel me to do anything," Will says, his voice soft. "You never have." Then, he sighs. "Hannibal, listen to me. We will not be parted long. When the time comes, you must be

ready. You must not return to Baltimore."

"Will -."

"Don't make me compel you, while I still have the power," Will says sharply. Hannibal swallows harshly. Without Hannibal's blood and his touch and his love, Will's Voice will fade, the growth in his neck will weaken and break apart until Hannibal is there to nurture it again. So, too, will Hannibal's Voice fade until he is, for all intents and purposes, an unmated Alpha once again.

Hannibal's knees rise, and he rests his elbow on one of them, curling his hand tightly in his hair. "I ache without you by my side," he confesses.

He can hear Will's smile. "Do you trust me?" he asks.

"Yes," Hannibal replies at once, without hesitation. "With everything I am."

"Then I will have strength," Will says. Hannibal hears a man shouting for him to wrap up the call. "I must go. I'm sure the proceedings of the trial will be all over *TattleCrime*. Miss Lounds has a thirst for anything regarding murder."

"I will," Hannibal replies. "I will not rest until you're with me once again. I am yours to command."

Will sighs. "Goodbye, Doctor Lecter," he says, and then the call ends. Hannibal sets the phone down, unable to get his arms and legs to obey his desire to rise. Will's voice had been a temporary balm to his agony, and now with its absence, the pain returns as though it had never left. Hannibal cannot recall ever feeling so intensely broken. He has seen people as shadows, when their mates die before their time, or the bond between Alpha and Omega is violently severed. He wonders if this is how Will's father felt when his Alpha was gone.

After what feels like a lifetime, he manages to stand, and shower, and find his way to the bed. He had rented a room for a single occupant, knowing that the empty space where Will should be would taunt him past the ability to sleep.

It is strange, he thinks to himself, to have known someone for such a short amount of time and yet feel their absence so keenly. He tries to think of the many nights he spent away from Bedelia, tries to recall if he had ever missed her warmth and perfume so much, but he cannot bring himself to feel anything except the desire for Will's return.

He manages to find sleep when dawn is just touching the skies, painting the clouds pink and gold. He will watch, and he will wait, until the time comes when Will's shadow has grown large enough to cover the entire ocean and finds its way to his side once more.

BRIDE OF THE CHESAPEAKE RIPPER TO STAND TRIAL FOR HOMICIDE

For many years, the scourge of Baltimore, the Chesapeake Ripper, has plagued the minds of the FBI Behavioral Science Unit's best and brightest. Last week, the identity of the Chesapeake Ripper may have finally come to light. Special Agent Jack Crawford confirmed that, after search of the home of Doctor Hannibal Lecter – a prior surgeon and well-respected psychiatrist – human organs were found, as well as what can only be described as a murder dungeon in his basement.

Doctor Lecter had been an esteemed member of the Baltimore city elite for many years, his past showing nothing short of excellence, all the while maintaining his dark secret. Yes, my dear readers, it appears that not only was Doctor Lecter Baltimore's most notorious serial killer, but he also actively practiced cannibalism and would serve meals out of the organs he harvested from his victims.

The investigation peaked in a shocking, violent display at the home of Doctor Bedelia Du Maurier, who had been married to the Ripper for many years. She was found with her Omega lover, Anthony Dimmond, who had been cruelly beaten to death by none other than Will Graham, who for many months has been assisting the FBI BSU in the hunt for the Ripper.

But that's not all, my dear readers. Initial reports suggest that Will Graham is not only mated to Doctor Hannibal Lecter, but pregnant with his child. I have also uncovered that shortly before the attempt on Doctor Du Maurier's life, she had filed for divorce.

Doctor Du Maurier survived the brutal attack, saved just in time by the Baltimore police. She is in stable but critical condition at John Hopkins.

Was this a crime of passion, seeking to right past wrongs done to his Alpha? Or perhaps it speaks of the actions of a desperate Omega, compelled to get rid of loose ends by the Ripper? Did Doctor Du Maurier know of her husband's habits?

These are all questions I seek the answers to. It is too early to glean the true intention behind Mister Graham's actions, but as the trial runs its course, you can rest assured I will be at the front of the line and report on the entire proceedings so that we can all know the truth.

Freddie Lounds, journalist for *TattleCrime.*

Hannibal sighs, closing the browser window and setting his iPad to one side. So, Bedelia lived. That could prove problematic, especially if she were to testify. Hannibal closes his eyes, rubbing his hands over his face, and stares out of the window. Florence once held such joy for him, but it seems pale when he knows that Will is still under threat, and far away.

But perhaps there is something that can be done.

Hannibal rises, and goes to the stationery pad and pen on the little desk at the corner of the room. It is cheap material, hardly the kind of stock he would normally use, but it will do for

now. He writes quickly, the words a comparative scrawl instead of his normal neat writing.

He folds the paper and goes to the post office, purchasing an envelope for it and writing the address on the front. When he's done, he pays for the postage and leaves, shivering in the cold air and looking up at the clouds, which are dark and heavy, promising rain.

If there is one person he can trust to do what needs to be done, it's Chiyoh.

Days pass, and turn to one week, then the second. Hannibal reads *TattleCrime* rabidly, growing increasingly frustrated whenever he sees no new updates. Of course, the American judicial system is slow at best, glacial at worst. Even a high-profile murder isn't enough to cause much of a stir. If they had caught Hannibal himself, he's sure it would be the talk of the town.

Which is one more thing he owes Will, yet. Hannibal's freedom was granted by Will's actions – he made it so that Hannibal had time and means to escape, and Hannibal could not afford his mate the same thing. It feels like failure, the deepest and most cutting kind. How can he possibly sire a legacy and be the prime Alpha he has always strived to be, when he can't even keep his mate safe and secure by his side?

He turns his head when he hears the burner phone vibrate again. He rushes to it, answering it and excepting to hear the automatic message again. None comes. He frowns. "Hello?"

"Hannibal?"

Hannibal lets out a shaky breath. "Margot," he murmurs. "How did you get this number?"

"Will's lawyer gave it to me," she replies.

"I'm surprised he agreed to get one," Hannibal says mildly. Now that he knows it's not Will speaking to him, the sharpness is duller, and he finds himself more in control of his voice.

"I insisted," Margot says. "I'm paying for it. The best on the East Coast."

Hannibal blinks, frowning in surprise and taking a seat at his desk. "I'm…surprised," he says. "But thankful."

"Hannibal, I'll be blunt," Margot says primly. "When I think about the things you have done, I don't know what to feel. Revulsion is too base a word for it. But Will doesn't deserve to suffer because of you. So, I will do everything in my power to see him freed."

"In that respect, we are the same," Hannibal replies. "I didn't want Will to suffer."

"But you left him," Margot growls. Hannibal imagines how she looked when she would speak of Mason, teeth bared and wild light in her eyes. "You forced him to kill for you and then you left him to take the fall. I will never forgive you for that. Neither will Alana."

"Alana," Hannibal murmurs. "How is she?"

"She has barely spoken a word since the night Will was arrested," Margot says. "You had her believe you didn't know where Will was, or what he was doing." Hannibal swallows and resists the urge to correct her. If Margot believes that Will is innocent, then he still has some friends in Baltimore, and that is the greatest gift Hannibal can offer him at the moment. "You have wounded us both, Hannibal, to the bone."

"And for that I am deeply sorry," Hannibal replies, sincerity in his voice. "But I am glad that Will still holds your regard. He needs friends."

"And what of his *mate*?" Margot demands. "Are you going to abandon him, with your child in his belly? Am I to raise the legacy of the Ripper?"

Hannibal frowns. "Raise?" he repeats.

Margot lets out a short, frustrated huff. "Will's bail was announced yesterday," she says crisply. "I paid it, under the agreement that Will would stay with us. He managed to convince the judge that he wasn't a flight risk."

Hannibal smiles. "Because of Morgan," he says.

"*And* because even under Alpha Oath, Will could not tell anyone where you were, so he was not deemed a flight risk." The Alpha Oath – judges are always mated Alphas, so that they can compel the truth out of those being questioned. Hannibal's smile widens, praising his clever mate silently. His ability to manipulate situations rivals Hannibal's own.

"I know you will take care of him, Margot," Hannibal murmurs. "And for that you have my eternal gratitude."

"I don't do it for you," Margot snaps in reply. "But I promise if I even hear a whisper that you've returned to the States, I will hide Will away and you will never find him. I will not allow you to hurt him, or Alana, ever again."

Hannibal hums, resisting the urge to growl at the challenge. "Goodbye, Margot," he says, and hangs up the call. He debates getting rid of the phone, but if Will is going to have freedom pending his formal trial, he might try to call Hannibal, and this is the only way he would be able to, so Hannibal must keep it.

He sets the phone down, his fears somewhat assuaged. Knowing that Will is safely in Alana's and Margot's care has gone a long way to soothe his worry. He will be well-kept there, and free to roam around the vast Verger estate, away from the filth and decay of the prisons. Hannibal will not have to worry about Will's diet, if he's getting proper medical care for his pregnancy, or if he is being treated well by custodians and other inmates.

Omegas who commit violent crimes are unheard of. Even then, they are usually poor, broken creatures who are compelled to do it through the will of their Alphas. In this regard, Will has an advantage – the judicial system would be loathe to place blame on Will's shoulders and much more eager to point the finger at Hannibal, as the Chesapeake Ripper.

The only weak link in the chain is Bedelia. If she were to recover and testify, she could bring the whole orchestra down around her. Hannibal can only hope Chiyoh dispatches her on time, before another traitorous word can fall from her lips.

BRIDE OF THE CHESAPEAKE RIPPER WALKS FREE

Readers, I can hardly contain my shock and concern to learn that, not only was Will Graham released early this afternoon, but that his benefactor was none other than heiress to the Verger estate, Margot Verger, shown with her wife Alana and son Morgan (right).

Doctor Alana Bloom is an esteemed member of the FBI University faculty, and has long been friends of would-be Ripper victim, Special Agent Jack Crawford – and, it turns out, Will Graham. I managed to capture a shot of their reunion, pictured below.

If I'm not mistaken, dear readers, is it crazy to say that Morgan Verger bears a striking resemblance to Mister Graham? Perhaps his connection to the family goes beyond mere friendship. Of course, mated to the famous Doctor Hannibal Lecter, it's no surprise that Will Graham has found himself lucky enough to have such friends.

There has been another stunning revelation, dear readers, though this one is far less happy. It appears that Doctor Du Maurier, her wounds too extensive to bear, died in the early hours last night. With Will Graham in custody and no whisper of Doctor Lecter's return, the police have ruled out foul play – though I would be hesitant to believe it myself.

No, I fear this is all coming up too neatly, to the benefit of Mister Graham and his absent mate. Only time and further investigation will bring the truth to light, but you can rest assured that I will not rest until I have all of my questions answered. In fact, I am happy to report that I have requested a live interview with Mister Graham, and that request has been granted. I shall post the details so that you may all watch the Chesapeake Ripper's notable mate and see if all is as it appears.

Freddie Lounds, journalist for *TattleCrime.*

Hannibal swallows, his fingers curling around the edge of his iPad as he sees the shot of Will, being escorted by police to Alana and Margot. There are a set of three pictures, first of the three of them standing a way apart from each other, then Will on his knees, tightly embracing Morgan Verger. The third has Margot standing near them, Alana smiling and helping Will to his feet, both of her hands around one of Will's in a tender grip.

He smiles, though it's sad, seeing Will so obviously overjoyed at meeting with Alana and Margot. Whatever poison Alana holds in her heart for Hannibal, it clearly does not extend to

Will. Hannibal is sure that Will is able to masterfully twist both of them to his cause and his condition. After all, with Hannibal unable to be there and speak the truth, and Bedelia so unfortunately dispatched, Will's word is all that remains.

"What a delightful creature you are, my dear," he murmurs. His eyes read over the paragraph regarding Bedelia's death again, and his smile widens. He shall have to make sure Chiyoh receives a just reward for her service, as faithful as she has always been.

The one remaining obstacle is this interview Miss Lounds has scheduled. Hannibal resists the urge to worry – Will is a masterful manipulator, he has proven that time and again. He managed to have everyone fooled, including Alana, and Anthony, and Hannibal himself. Hannibal is not worried that Will might reveal his location, or his status, for Will knows neither. But Freddie is a tenacious creature, and she is not one to tread lightly around delicate subjects. If there is anyone that could incur Will's wrath, it would be her.

He can only hope that Will's strength holds, and prepare a place for him when the lens of the media has shifted and Will is free to return to his side.

He moves into the center of the city, killing a man and his Omega and stealing their names for himself. They live in a lovely apartment near Hannibal's favorite galleria, and although he knows Will would roll his eyes at the opulence of their residence, Hannibal starts to feel somewhat like himself again. The walls are covered in gold, the floor a dark hardwood, the view from the bedroom is beautiful. It is the kind of place Hannibal imagined himself retiring in, once he had tired of picking apart people's brains and settled to a life of comfort and tranquility.

He kills another man, a curator at a museum, and assumes his title and job position. It is done with almost comical ease, and he entertains himself with waxing poetic about art and instruments of torture in the museum, delights in filling the ears of new friends with tales of his lovely mate, and how 'He is resting, the pregnancy is hard on him, but as soon as he recovers we shall have you over for dinner'.

His Voice fades. He feels it like a cold about to descend, his body rejecting the absence of its mate heartily until his throat feels threaded and weak like coarse canvas. Of course, with a mate as sick as he claims, it would be improper to mount him, so the loss of his Voice is no cause for alarm or concern amongst his peers, but it troubles him deeply. He has had it for such a short amount of time and lost it so quickly, and with it, he feels like he loses the last piece of Will he could keep.

He relishes the thought of having Will again, of pressing him up against the towering bookshelf, scattering the old pages and bindings to the ground. His dreams are filled with Will's predatory eyes, his red teeth bared at Hannibal as Hannibal stalks and chases him through their apartment. He can still taste in his memory the sweetness of Will's slick, the salt of his sweat, still hear that lovely whine he would give whenever Hannibal would force his throat to bare.

He will mount Will is every corner of the apartment, stain it in equal parts blood, sweat, and slick. He will have the neighbors complain about how loud Will howls and cries for him. He will regain his Voice, and give Will's back to him, and they will prowl through and conquer Italy like new land.

All of this, he thinks into existence. He paints it across his mind palace like the largest canvas, wills it into being through the force of his desire and his determination. He will bring Will back to his side and fill their home with children and light, and destroy anyone who might be foolish enough to come between them.

"Mister Graham, thank you for agreeing to meet with me."

"It's no trouble, Miss Lounds. I'm happy to do anything I can to satisfy the media's questions, and put this whole unfortunate business behind us."

The hour is late, but Hannibal has never been more awake. He settles down in the lounge area of the apartment, a glass of wine in hand, his gaze fixed on the live feed as Freddie's shoulder and mane of orange curls come into view. The camera is fixed on Will, and he looks…good. God, he looks so good. He's well-rested, dressed in comfortable-looking clothes, the faded bite marks on his neck bared for Hannibal's ravenous gaze. Like he knows Hannibal is watching. Perhaps he does.

His hair is fluffy and curls around his ears and neck, hiding his eyes whenever he ducks his head. The gold in his eyes is faded, not as bright without the presence of his Alpha to encourage it to glow. He has a glass of water in his hands, his elbows on his knees, perched in a thickly-padded black leather chair. Behind him, the window is open, revealing a snippet of the green Verger estate.

Hannibal cannot see Freddie's face, but he is sure she's smiling, pleased at getting a peek behind the curtain. "You call it 'unfortunate'," she says, tilting her head to one side. "Why do you choose that word?"

"Because it is," Will replies with a shrug, his smile soft and sheepish. "I deeply regret my actions."

"Actions that you claim you committed because your mate compelled you to?" Freddie asks. Will presses his lips together, ducking his eyes, and nods.

"I didn't wish Doctor Du Maurier or Mister Dimmond any harm," he says. "It saddens me deeply to know that she died."

"No harm at all? Not even as the ex-wife of your mate? And her lover?" Freddie presses. Will shakes his head. Hannibal must admit, he's doing a remarkable job of appearing submissive and shaken, like he's horrified at what he's done. "Why would your Alpha want them dead?"

"I didn't ask," Will says, somewhat tightly, his eyes flashing. It's gone as quick as it had come, and he shivers, putting a hand over his stomach in what appears to be an absent gesture, but Hannibal can see the ploy for what it is. "Perhaps she had slighted him."

"Do you think she knew the Ripper's true nature?" Freddie asks.

Will shrugs one shoulder. "I didn't," he replies coolly. "I'm sure Doctor Du Maurier was a fine psychiatrist, but he was…" He swallows, the façade breaking so artfully, and turns his face away. "I'm sorry. Some loyalty lingers."

"I can't imagine why," Freddie says crisply. "He ordered you to kill, then left you to take the fall."

Will's eyes flash, an offense hitting a little too close to home. "I know," he says tightly, meeting Freddie's eyes again. "He's a monster. There's no denying that."

"A monster you still defend," Freddie says. "You never told the judge where they might find him. Why is that?"

"Because I don't know," Will replies.

"Do you think he will return for you?"

"I hope not," Will says. His eyes dart to the camera, then away, his lips pulled back to show the edge of his teeth. He shivers and takes a drink of water. "Now that I know what he did, the thought of his hands on me is…repulsive."

Hannibal huffs a laugh.

"What about your child, then?" Freddie asks. Will blinks at her, his hand tightening across his stomach. "It's true, isn't it? You're pregnant with the Ripper's baby?"

"…Yes," Will says, sitting a little more upright. His hand moves from his stomach and flattens over his thigh, his knuckles turning white. "It's true."

"Psychopaths are narcissists, Mister Graham," Freddie says mildly. "Do you really think he would have abandoned you, as the mother of his legacy? Or that he will not come back for the child?"

"No," Will says tightly. "I don't."

"Interesting," Freddie says, straightening up and reaching for something out of frame. Will's expression darkens when he sees whatever she is holding. "Do you know what this is, Mister Graham?"

Will shakes his head, his jaw bulging at the corner.

"This was found in Doctor Du Maurier's home," Freddie says. "It's a contract for your services as a surrogate, during the time that Doctor Lecter and Doctor Du Maurier were

married. Now, to go through all this trouble, and then not claim the child? Seems a little far-fetched, don't you think?"

Will's eyes flash. He runs a hand through his hair and Hannibal growls out a curse under his breath. He should have recovered and burned the contract as soon as Bedelia filed for divorce.

"Here's what I think happened," Freddie says, and though Hannibal cannot see her face, he can hear her smile; "Your services were hired with the aim to produce children, since Doctor Du Maurier could not. During the courtship phase, you saw an opportunity. You seduced Doctor Lecter and either convinced him, or agreed with him, to divorce his wife so that you would have sole custody of the house. Enraged by the divorce, Doctor Du Maurier threatened to expose her husband for what he truly was, and you couldn't allow that, so you killed her, and her lover."

Hannibal hums. "Clever girl."

Will huffs a laugh. "Rather sensational, don't you think?" he asks, taking another drink of water. "Why would I knowingly enter into a partnership with the Chesapeake Ripper?"

"Why indeed?" Freddie replies coolly.

Will swallows, and Hannibal knows the look he's giving her well. Will is fighting the urge to snarl at her. "That's a fun theory," Will says, "but ultimately false. I had no reason to kill Doctor Du Maurier, or Mister Dimmond. It is only through the whims of my Alpha that I'm speaking to you now."

"Oh, so he's still 'your' Alpha?" Freddie says sharply.

Will pauses, and clears his throat. "Old habit," he says.

"Not that old, considering the date of this contract," Freddie murmurs.

Will manages a tight smile, showing the edges of his teeth. "Will all due respect, Miss Lounds, you are not Omega. Nor are you Alpha. I wouldn't expect you to understand. I have given my testimony and agreed to this interview as a gesture of good faith."

"And I merely wish to find out the truth," Freddie says with a warm smile, holding her hands out in an open gesture. "A thing I'm sure we both wish to uncover."

Will hums, his eyes shadowed. "Of course."

Freddie hums, as though in thought, and then stands, holding out a hand for Will to shake. Will does so. "Thank you for meeting me, Mister Graham. I wish you luck at your trial."

"Thank you, Miss Lounds," Will replies, and then Freddie turns her attention to her camera, and the live feed shuts off.

Hannibal sighs, closing the browser. Will navigated her masterfully, as Hannibal knew he would. He had been unprepared for how deeply seeing Will and hearing his voice would

affect him. Like a hook in his mouth, Hannibal feels compelled to board the next flight back to Baltimore, to sweep Will away under the cover of night and keep him safe in these golden walls.

But he must wait. Will made him promise that he would, and to take Will away now would only cement his guilt and harden Margot's and Alana's hearts against him, and their patronage may still be needed. But Will is safe, and the outlook is bright for him.

Hannibal smiles to himself and finishes his wine. He has told himself this a thousand times, but even so, he finds himself thinking that he should know better than to doubt Will. Will's eyes are sharp, his mind able to read even the most stone-faced of people. His instincts and his prowess with evoking emotion will save his neck, of that Hannibal has no doubt.

Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

idk how court proceedings work

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal looks up when he hears a knock on the door. He frowns, pushing himself to his feet, and looks through the peephole. He smiles, and opens the door. "Hello, Chiyoh," he says, greeting her warmly. She smiles at him, stepping inside when he invites her in. She looks much the same as he remembers, although it has been a long time since he last saw her.

"Hello," she replies, setting down her sniper rifle case by the door and unwrapping her scarf from her neck.

"How have you been?" Hannibal asks, and leads the way into the kitchen to open a new bottle of wine. It's a crisp, light white, like he remembers her favoring. She takes a glass and brings it to her lips for a drink before answering.

"The same," she says. Always a woman of few words. "You've been busy."

"I'm sorry," Hannibal replies, and he is. She has always been a favored and trusted friend of his, and has served him without complaint for many years. "How is your charge?"

"Dead," she replies. Hannibal hums, taking a drink from his own glass. "Or close to it, I imagine. I left him a chicken and told him I would be gone for a while."

"Starving to death is no better than a man like him deserves," Hannibal replies.

She smiles, arching one eyebrow. "And you?" she asks. "What does a man like you deserve?"

"Far worse," Hannibal says with a smile. "I'm glad you got my letter."

"You've been up to no good, as always," Chiyoh murmurs, taking a seat at the dining room table next to the open-plan kitchen. Hannibal joins her, settling into place. "Married, divorced, mated. I'm sure you have quite the stories to tell."

"If you'd like to hear them, I'm more than happy to share."

She shakes her head. "I'm more interested in what happens now," she says, regarding him coolly. She takes another drink of wine.

Hannibal smiles at her. "Now, I suppose we wait," he replies with a shrug. "You've done well, disposing of the last piece of a puzzle that would see my mate and child sentenced to lifetime

imprisonment. I'm confident that Will is capable of doing the rest to secure his freedom." He pauses, and sighs. "There is one more thing I would ask of you."

"Of course," she says.

"When he's free, he cannot be seen leaving the country immediately. He doesn't know where I am, and I cannot go to him without being seen. You, however, can."

"I've been promoted from jailor to delivery boy, then," Chiyoh responds with a small laugh.

"Only until Will is safely by my side once again. Once that is done, you may ask anything of me. You may go wherever you'd like, and I will help you set up a new life for yourself."

"Do you think there's anything left for me, beyond those walls?" Chiyoh asks. Her words are terse, but there's no venom in them. Her eyes are dark when they rake over Hannibal's face. "I have called that castle home for more years than you did. Where else would I go?"

"If you do not wish to go, then stay," Hannibal replies.

She presses her lips together, sighing through her nose, and takes another drink of wine. "When is the trial?" she asks.

"I don't know yet," Hannibal says, unable to stop himself giving a huff of frustration. "The American legal system is far from efficient. It may be months before Will steps foot in a courtroom again. The D.A. will try to find something to convict him, or make a deal for my whereabouts, which he cannot give."

"It would be easier to spirit him away now," Chiyoh replies.

"I've thought about it," Hannibal says. "But I promised him I wouldn't behave rashly. And there are…extenuating circumstances."

Chiyoh smiles. "There always are."

"I'm starting to realize how damaging my behavior has become," Hannibal adds, quietly, as though speaking to himself; "Through my actions, I have robbed those I care about of so much time. You, most of all."

"You see it as a robbery, I see it as a gift," Chiyoh replies, just as softly. "For Mischa."

Hannibal smiles. "And for that, I shall be eternally grateful."

"So now what happens? We wait more?"

"Yes," Hannibal replies with a sigh. "I would ask that you return to America, and keep an eye on Will in whatever capacity you are able. I can share with you all the information I have. Then, when the time is right, send word to me, and I will make sure to clear the way for you to bring him back to me."

Chiyoh regards him for a long moment, before she smiles. "You are both exactly the same and so different from the man I knew growing up," she says fondly.

"How so?"

"You're a big cat now," Chiyoh says. "The kind that has grown from a frightened young cub, and yet in the way you speak about this man, I see your devotion and loyalty. The same recklessness you had as a child."

"I'll take that as a compliment."

"As you should," Chiyoh adds with a nod. "When we were young, I thought of you as this unattainable thing. Someone to be held above all others. This man must be very special, for you to risk so much."

"He is," Hannibal says. Plainly. No embellishment. There are simply not enough words to describe Will, nor how to adequately encompass Hannibal's need to be close to him again. With Will, everything is in technicolor – the beautiful world becomes that much brighter for his presence. It is much the same way Will described Alana; the sun comes into the room with him, and the room darkens for his lack of being there.

"Then I will do it," Chiyoh says with a nod, finishing her wine.

The next time Hannibal sees Will, it is back in the court room. The media has been allowed in to record the high-profile case. It has been several weeks, and Hannibal fights back the surge of emotions when he sees the small bump of his child swelling in Will's belly. Will looks rested, but frail, and whether that's a deliberate choice of acting on his part, or genuine, Hannibal cannot tell. He enters the room with Margot, Alana, Morgan, and his lawyer, and takes his seat beyond the swing door to where the defense and prosecution sits.

"All rise for the honorable Judge Atwell presiding."

The room stands, and the judge enters. He's a thin man, gaunt in the face, with sharp brown eyes. "Be seated," he says, and everyone sits. Hannibal isn't certain he's ever borne witness to such an anticipated event. His heart is steady but loud in his ears. He can see Freddie's mane of orange curls close to the front, sees a woman he recognizes as Bedelia's cousin sitting behind the prosecution.

The jury is a healthy mix of Alphas, Omegas, and women, to eliminate unnecessary bias. It is imperative that every jury contain a few of each gender, to allow the fairest assessment of the evidence and testimony.

Will is sitting with his hands cradling his stomach, his face a careful mask of moderate discomfort typical during the morning sickness phase. Hannibal knows that under Margot and Alana's care, he will have been taken care of, but he cannot help feel a pang of sadness,

knowing he's missing the most delicate and lovely stages of his mate's pregnancy because of his actions. He should be there, he should be at Will's side, to pet through his hair when he's emptying his stomach into the toilet, to offer him ginger tea and feed him the best meals to curb his cravings and keep him satisfied. He should have his teeth in Will's neck, be there to hear Will's Voice, take him shopping for clothes to accommodate his growing stomach.

But he's not. Instead, he is a thousand miles away, hiding like a bandit in his own home.

He will make it up to Will a thousand-fold, for the rest of his life, but that doesn't lessen the sting of the present to any degree.

He sees, in one of the arcs of the cameras, Chiyoh's face amongst the reporters clustered in at the back of the room, and smiles.

"The case of the people versus Will Graham is now in session," Judge Atwell begins, sitting back in his chair. "The prosecution may proceed with opening remarks."

"Thank you, your honor." The Prosecuting Attorney stands, and smiles at the jury. Hannibal stifles a growl, shifting in his seat. The man reminds him of Chilton, for his slick smile and ill-fitting suit. He looks like the kind of person who would sell his own mother for a confession. "Ladies and gentlemen of the jury. Today I'm going to prove to you that this man," he points to Will, "is not all his breed would allow you to believe. Do not let your preconceptions fool you. Will Graham was arrested by Baltimore P.D. in the middle of the murder of Anthony Dimmond and attempted murder of Doctor Bedelia Du Maurier – two upstanding citizens of Baltimore. Mated to the notorious Chesapeake Ripper, Mister Graham was in full possession of his agency and, knowingly and with malice of forethought, murdered two people in the defense of his mate. Today I will show you that Mister Graham is a danger, not only to society, but all those who would still stand between him and the Ripper."

"Thank you, Mister Clemens. Miss Hammond, please present your opening remarks."

"Thank you, your honor." Will's lawyer is young, which Hannibal finds surprising. Margot had said she'd hired the best on the East Coast, and it's not easy to gain such a reputation in one's formative years. She stands, clearing her throat, and walks out into the middle of the main area to address the jury.

"I am not here to argue whether or not my client harmed Mister Dimmond and Doctor Du Maurier. There is enough evidence for that and, as Mister Clemens pointed out, he was caught at the scene of the crime. However, I would ask you to think on this; what could persuade him to do such a thing? My client has been a loyal and irreplaceable asset to the FBI and police in the arrest of countless other killers. My colleague would ask you to ignore the fact that he's Omega, but to do that would be to ignore the truth; my client was mated to by the Chesapeake Ripper, and forced to commit crimes that are impossible to others of his species. He is, by his very nature, unable to commit such crimes except under extreme duress, and under the order of an Alpha's command. Today I am going to show you that Mister Graham is a good, honest man, who simply fell prey to the worst kind of monster our great city has ever seen."

She finishes with another nod, and Hannibal presses his lips together as she returns to Will's side. Will hasn't moved the entire time, but smiles weakly at her, and allows her to put a hand on his shoulder. He raises his hand to squeeze hers gently – a perfectly executed gesture of nervousness and anxiety. Hannibal feels his chest swell with pride.

"Thank you, Miss Hammond. Prosecution, please call your first witness."

"I call on Special Agent Jack Crawford."

A small murmur breaks through the crowd, and Hannibal growls when he sees Jack stand from the first row and approach the witness stand. He should have lingered a moment longer to make sure the man was dead. "Agent Crawford," Atwell says, his Alpha Voice strong in the silence, "do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?"

"I do," Jack replies, answering with his own Voice, and takes his seat. He has a thick bandage around his neck and speaks hoarsely.

"Your witness, Mister Clemens."

"Agent Crawford, how long have you been working for the FBI?" Clemens asks, leaning against the side of his desk, arms crossed.

"Decades," Jack replies.

"And how long in that time has Mister Graham been assisting you with the investigation and arrest of murderers?"

Jack's eyes flash to Will. From Hannibal's view point, he cannot read the emotion in them. "A little over five years."

"So, you could confidently say you know the man," Clemens presses, and Jack nods. "I've been told that Mister Graham's methods are…unusual." Jack frowns, nodding again. "Would you be able to shed some light on that?"

Jack clears his throat. "Will is able to read crime scenes from the point of view of the one who committed them," he says slowly. "Their emotions affect him, let him get a better view of the motive."

"Their emotions," Clemens repeats. "So things like anger, betrayal, et cetera?"

"Yes," Jack says.

"I imagine, being so sensitive to things like that, it affected Mister Graham harder than most."

"Objection," Miss Hammond says, rising. "What's the relevance here?"

"Sustained," Atwell replies. "Mister Clemens, please make your point."

"Of course, your honor," Clemes says with that same snake-oil smile. "Agent Crawford, do you think about such a prolonged time reading the minds of serial killers, Mister Graham

would find it in himself to commit these murders himself?"

Jack hesitates. "You are under oath, Agent Crawford," Clemens adds.

"I…will admit, sometimes Will worried me," Jack says. "Shortly before the attack on Mister Dimmond and Doctor Du Maurier, he was…changed. He became aggressive and short-tempered. I never found out why."

Clemens smiles. "No further questions," he says, and takes a seat.

"Your witness, Miss Hammond."

"Thank you, your honor," she replies, standing. She pauses for a moment, and looks back at Will, then at Jack. "Agent Crawford, you mention that my client went through somewhat of a behavioral change, is that correct?"

"Yes," Jack says.

"And would it be fair to say that this behavioral change began around the same time Mister Graham and Doctor Lecter mated?"

"I…"

Jack frowns, and Miss Hammond smiles. "You *did* know they were mated, correct?"

"Yes," Jack says darkly, looking at Will again. "I did."

"That doesn't seem to be something you approve of."

"I only knew Doctor Lecter in passing," Jack says.

"You're very protective of my client," Miss Hammond says.

Jack nods.

"So I'll ask again; do you think it's possible that Mister Graham's relationship with Doctor Lecter would have caused such drastic changes in him?"

"…Yes," Jack finally admits, huffing. "I don't think he would have done anything like this on his own."

"Thank you, Agent Crawford," Miss Hammond says. "No further questions, your honor."

Hannibal smiles, a soft sound of pleasure rumbling in his chest. "Well done," he says, watching as Jack rises from the witness stand and takes his seat. When all is said and done, he shall have to send Miss Hammond a 'Thank you' present.

"Your next witness, Mister Clemens," Atwell says.

Clemens calls Freddie Lounds next. She poses the same theory she had in her interview with Will, her sharp tongue doing nothing to settle Hannibal's frayed nerves. Although, of course,

she cannot give any testimony as to Will's character, her ruthless persistence of the surrogacy contract and Will's motivations towards such – Hannibal can see that they sway the jury. Miss Hammond, to her credit, manages to cast doubt on Freddie's testimony, but Hannibal isn't sure it will be enough.

"Your honor, we could beat around the bush all day, but I think it's better that we simply cut to the chase. I'd like to call Will Graham to the stand."

Hannibal can see the tension thickening in the room. Will stands, the picture of demure submission, and awkwardly makes his way from his seat and to the stand. He swears the Alpha Oath, and Hannibal feels a little niggling shred of worry in the back of his head. When under Oath, Will cannot possibly lie. Without his Voice, he's even more vulnerable to it. Hannibal can only hope that fate and luck are on their sides.

"Mister Graham, how are you feeling?"

Will blinks at Clemens, frowning, and bites his lower lip. He curls up tighter in his chair like he's expecting a blow. "Fine," he replies.

"Really?" Clemens asks. "I imagine these last few months have been very stressful for you."

"My child is safe and healthy, and so am I," Will replies, somewhat sharply. "That's the best I can hope for right now." He pauses. "Is there a point to this?"

"Forgive me, I'm just curious," Clemens says with a wide, toothy smile. "Tell me, then, Mister Graham. How did you come to meet Doctor Lecter, and Doctor Du Maurier and Mister Dimmond?"

"Doctor Lecter and I met through a mutual friend," Will says. "He was married to Doctor Du Maurier at the time, and Mister Dimmond was their friend as well. I only met him a few times."

"And what was the nature of your relationship, at the beginning?"

Will's jaw clenches, he drops his eyes and heaves a breath. "I agreed to be a surrogate for them," he says. "Doctor Du Maurier couldn't have children, and so I agreed to do it for them."

"That's an incredible favor, considering you didn't know them," Clemens says lightly.

Will doesn't answer. He meets Clemens' gaze steadily. Hannibal smiles, able to see the challenge in the tilt of his chin and the clench of his jaw. The camera through which the live feed is going zooms in on Will's face and Hannibal sighs, in love with the subtle way Will bares his teeth.

"Is there a question in this?" Will asks after a moment of silence.

"Right, right, I'm sorry," Clemens says, waving his hand dismissively. He goes back to his desk and takes out a folder. "I'd like to submit this forensics report as exhibit F. Mister Graham, you claim to have only met Mister Dimmond a few times before his murder."

"Yes," Will replies.

"Would you be able to explain to the court why DNA evidence was found in your mate's basement that matches Mister Dimmond's?"

Hannibal straightens up. Of course. The *basement*. Will blinks at Clemens, clearing his throat, the first flash of uncertainty passing over his face.

"I -." Will swallows. "Mister Dimmond was a good friend of Doctor Lecter's," he replies. "I imagine his DNA was all over the house."

"Perhaps I should ask my question more directly, then. Toxicology reports found blood spatter dated mere hours before Mister Dimmond's murder. Why was his blood in the basement, Mister Graham?"

"Damn it," Hannibal murmurs, rubbing a hand over his mouth.

Will sighs, closing his eyes. "Because I put it there," he says.

Silence meets his confession. Miss Hammond stands. "Your honor, I'd like to request a recess to have a moment with my client -."

"Miss Hammond, I would like to hear what Mister Graham has to say," Atwell says, holding up a hand. She sits back down, her jaw clenching angrily. "Please proceed, Mister Clemens."

"Thank you, your honor." Clemens' smile is wide; the cat that caught the canary. "Would you like to elaborate, Mister Graham?"

"Mister Dimmond came to me when Doctor Lecter wasn't home. He was frantic, panicking, and told me that Doctor Lecter was the Chesapeake Ripper. I knew if I let him go, he'd go straight to the police, so I knocked him out and restrained him until I could figure out what to do."

"Now, Mister Graham, why would you do something like that?"

Will meets Clemens' eyes, and Hannibal sees something flash there; the formation of a plan of attack. He sits forward, clutching his iPad tightly. "It's no secret that the FBI was investigating the Chesapeake Ripper," Will says. "If Anthony was right, and accused Doctor Lecter without just cause and evidence, then the Ripper would be in the wind before he was caught. I couldn't allow that to happen, so I told him that I was investigating Doctor Lecter on behalf of the FBI and that he should be silent and testify when it came time to arrest him."

"Interesting, considering that during initial testimony, your superior said he had no knowledge of this plan."

Will smiles, tight and warningly; "Mister Clemens, you're an Alpha. So, too, is Special Agent Crawford. He wouldn't have allowed me to continue my investigation if he knew how dangerous it was."

"So mating with Doctor Lecter and bearing his child, that was all for the sake of the case, was it?" Clemens asks.

Will hesitates, pressing his lips together. "No," he confesses quietly. "Doctor Lecter… influenced me. I found myself enraptured by him. There isn't anything I wouldn't have done for him if he asked it of me."

"Your loyalty to your Alpha is notable."

"And old," Will says, forcing the words out. "He's a monster. He's a killer. He threatened to cut my child out of me if I turned on him."

"And yet, if he showed up in this courtroom right now, and asked you to go with him, you would do it."

"Any Omega would," Will replies. Hannibal smiles – he knows Will doesn't want to admit it; it's only through the Oath that he must answer. But that doesn't mean it's not the truth.

Clemens retrieves another piece of paper from his desk and hands it to the judge. "Exhibit G," he says. "Will Graham's phone records on the night of the murder. Mister Graham, you placed a three-minute call to Doctor Lecter's phone a little while before your arrest. What was the nature of the call?"

Will swallows. "I wanted to clear my name," he says. "Doctor Lecter believed that I was disloyal to him. I wanted him to hear Doctor Du Maurier confess that she had told Anthony about his true nature."

"So, Doctor Du Maurier knew that her husband was a killer, a cannibal. She never thought to tell you this during the surrogacy arrangement?"

"No."

Clemens frowns. "Mister Graham, did Doctor Lecter ask you to kill Mister Dimmond and Doctor Du Maurier?" he says.

Hannibal can see the change come over Will. He's fighting with all his might to resist the Alpha Oath, to lie without it being a lie. It makes his skin turn pale, his shoulders shake, and he wraps his hands around his swollen stomach tightly. "He made me swear I would do whatever it took to keep our family safe," Will replies quietly, broken at the base of his neck. "So that's what I had to do."

Clemens hums, and turns to face the jury. He looks at Will, then at Miss Hammond, and nods. "No further questions," he says.

"Thank you, Mister Graham," Atwell says. "Please take a seat."

Will all but collapses into his seat, his head in his hands. Hannibal can see Alana behind him, reaching forward to put a hand on his shoulder. He sighs, shaking his head, and doesn't reach back out to her. The camera zooms out and focuses on judge Atwell instead.

"We will have closing remarks, and then the jury will retire to make their decision."

Clemens stands, looking at Will one more time. "Here's what I think happened," he says. "Between the physical evidence, testimonies from Mister Graham's coworkers and investigations done by the media, Mister Graham would have you believe he is a victim of circumstance. He entered into an agreement with a man who turned out to be the most notorious serial killer Baltimore has seen for years. But I want you to ask yourselves, as members of the jury, if you believe it so impossible that Mister Graham is capable of acting on his own agency and desires. Mister Dimmond and Doctor Du Maurier presented threats to Doctor Lecter, and Mister Graham took it upon himself to rid his mate of that threat. Do not let your sympathies cloud your judgement – Mister Graham could have turned in Doctor Lecter at any moment, but instead he chose to mate with, breed for, and is even now protecting Doctor Lecter. His testimony is moving, of course, but it is merely a performance. I urge the jury to see through that, and gaze upon the truth."

Hannibal growls to himself, and pictures gutting the man from sternum to bladder and watching him bleed out, clutching at his own intestines.

"Miss Hammond, your closing remarks."

Miss Hammond stands, and walks up to the edge of the jury stand. She smiles at them, pretty and gentle, and gestures back to Will. Will looks like he's going to be sick, and whether that is genuine or not, Hannibal couldn't possibly say.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the jury," she begins. "My client has proven time and again to be an upstanding, moral citizen. He has answered every question honestly, while suffering a harrowing pregnancy created through a dishonest mating. Mister Clemens doesn't want to see Mister Graham as a victim, and I understand why, but I ask you to look at this man, and think of the Omegas you know in your life. You heard it yourself – Doctor Lecter was a monster, who threatened him, and his child, should Mister Graham prove disloyal. Can any of you say you wouldn't have been drawn to similar drastic measures, to protect those you loved?"

Hannibal is pleased to see some of the Omegas in the jury give subtle nods of agreement, one of them pressing a hand to the mating bite on their own neck. He smiles. The Omega and Alpha vote will certainly be swayed by such testimony.

Although, Hannibal feels another shard of guilt strike him at the reminder of how terribly he treated Will in those final hours. It is because of him that Will is in this situation, and if necessary, it will be up to Hannibal to save Will from a terrible fate.

The jury's decision takes almost five days. Hannibal spends most of that time distracted beyond reason. He can't focus at work – when asked, he says that his mate's illness has taken a turn for the worse, and he has been hospitalized. It garners him enough sympathy to prevent further questions.

He doesn't hear from Chiyoh, and Will doesn't call the burner phone.

Then, late at night, Hannibal loads *TattleCrime* and sees;

BRIDE OF THE CHESAPEAKE RIPPER FOUND GUILTY OF HOMICIDE

Hannibal sucks in a breath, his fingers trembling as he clicks on the headline. "No," he whispers, his eyes wide, reading the article as fast as he can. But there it is; undeniable truth. They convicted Will of murder in the second degree for both Anthony and Bedelia.

Mister Graham has been sentenced to life in prison without possibility of parole. However, due to the nature of his pregnancy and circumstances regarding his mating to the Chesapeake Ripper, Judge Atwell deemed it sufficient that Will Graham be confined to a holding cell in the Verger Estate until he gives birth, where he will then be transferred to the Maryland State Hospital for the Criminally Insane for the remainder of his sentence.

"It is my belief," judge Atwell declared, "that the criminal institution will provide Mister Graham the necessary rehabilitation he needs in the wake of such disturbing mating effects."

"No!" Hannibal snarls, closing the iPad and throwing it to the other end of the couch. He stands, growling loudly in the silence of the apartment, and paces to the window to stare out at the golden street lamps of Florence. At ground level, the people look as little more than ants, scurrying about their boring lives and their mediocre existence. Hannibal's upper lip curls, and he turns his head when he hears the burner phone vibrating.

He goes to it, not recognizing the number. "Yes?"

"Hannibal." It's Chiyoh. Hannibal lets out another rough growl. "Did you see it?"

"Yes," Hannibal replies sharply. "What the Hell happened?"

"I don't know," she says. "I'm as surprised as you are."

"He can't stay there," Hannibal says. "I will not allow my child to be born away from me, nor my mate sent to prison."

Chiyoh hums. "I've been watching the Vergers," she says mildly. "They do not guard their estate very well. It wouldn't be much trouble to get inside."

"Do not harm Alana, Margot, or their son," Hannibal says. "Will would never forgive me if they were injured."

"I don't think that'll be a problem."

"Please, Chiyoh," Hannibal whispers. "You must get him out of there, if I cannot."

"How will I earn his trust?" Chiyoh asks. "How do I convince him that you have sent me?"

Hannibal sighs, closing his eyes, and rubs a hand over his mouth. He tries to think back to the many intimate conversations they have shared, for something that would have only come from him, that Chiyoh would tell Will and that Will would recognize.

"Tell him that this is my last selfish act," he says. "Tell him that I'm in darkness, and I'm waiting for him to draw me into the light."

Chiyoh pauses, and then lets out an accepting sound. "I'll see it done," she says, and then the call ends. Hannibal clutches the phone tightly, resisting the urge to throw it away.

He will have to make preparations quickly. Will could be back at his side in less than twenty-four hours. Hannibal will create a feast for him, a grand display to welcome the return of his perfect mate. Florence will sing praises to him, and the streets will be awash with blood; a drop equal to every moment they have been apart.

Decided, Hannibal pockets his phone, and dons his coat. He has work to do.

Hannibal is frantic for the next three days. He kills and harvests from a score of people – museum goers who ask inappropriate questions; a security guard from the galleria; a group of teenagers who he finds painting graffiti on a chapel wall. He roasts cuts from their legs and arms, starts preparations for prosciutto – that he will not use yet, but in a few months' time when the meat is cured – jellies stock and serves it with slices of rib meat. He makes sausages from intestines, sears hearts and lungs, and creates a veritable hoard of food in preparation for Will's arrival.

He leaves the door unlocked at all times, impatient for the time when Will knocks on the door.

He returns from a shift at the museum to find the door locked. He frowns, unlocks it, and opens the door to the scent of warmed meat, music playing on the Victrola by the front door. Amidst that is a scent he recognizes like it's engrained in his own flesh.

He smiles, and closes the door loudly enough to draw attention. "Will?" he calls, and there's movement from the next room, a shadow giving way to a man, and Hannibal's breath stills in his lungs.

Will meets his eyes, the irises glowing golden in joy, and Hannibal drops his keys and coat and lunges for him, pulling him into a tight embrace. Will clutches back, a rough growl

shaking his ribs and his shoulders as Hannibal presses his face to Will's neck and breathes in deeply; that mint and lemongrass scent is as sharp and sweet as ever, peppered with Will's pregnancy scent.

"Hannibal," Will breathes, his voice muffled against Hannibal's shoulder. Hannibal pulls back, cups his face, pets his hair back from his neck. Will looks just as beautiful as ever, the slight protrusion of his belly presses against Hannibal's gut, and Hannibal might just weep for joy at seeing his mate in front of him, alive and whole and *here*.

He can't think of a single thing to say. It is not often he finds himself without words, without voice, but seeing Will in front of him is something he has anticipated for what feels like a thousand years, and there simply aren't words.

Will, it seems, has some of his own; "You obeyed me," he breathes, touching Hannibal's cheek. His skin is wet with tears, but Hannibal doesn't care. Will's hand flattens on his jaw, his eyes wide and awed. "You didn't come back to Baltimore."

"You told me not to," Hannibal replies, hoarse and low.

"That woman," Will murmurs. "Who is she?"

"A childhood friend," Hannibal says. "One to whom my debt and gratitude has never been higher. Is she here?"

Will shakes his head. "She left me at the airport, ordered a car for me, and boarded another flight," he replies. "She told me to take care of you, and that neither of us should try and contact her again."

Hannibal huffs a laugh, though it's strained. "That sounds like her," he murmurs. He brushes his thumbs over Will's pink cheeks, his breath leaving him unsteadily. "Every second apart from you stretched on for a year."

"I knew we'd be together again," Will replies quietly. His smile is wide, off-kilter, as perfect as the rest of him. Hannibal shivers, dropping one hand when Will cradles his wrist, and flattens it over the swell of Will's belly. "Alana still thinks I'm innocent. She would have helped me, if you hadn't sent that woman."

"After the trial, I -."

"I don't want to talk about that," Will growls, his eyes bright with that predatory light Hannibal has only seen a few times but is already so keenly in love with. "The only thing I care about is if there is still a place for me; at your side, in your home."

"Always," Hannibal vows. His hand tightens in Will's hair, and he draws him in for a kiss. It's deep, passionate, as Will's lips part for him like they were never separated. Hannibal's head is burning, his teeth feel too sharp, but his hands are gentle and reverent on Will's neck and stomach. "Forever."

"Good," Will growls, gasping into the kiss, immediately beginning a second when the first one ends. He clutches at Hannibal tightly, like he cannot stand an inch of air between them. It is a sentiment Hannibal feels sharply as well, like every inch of skin untouched by his hands is a personal insult. Every breath Will gains independent of his own lungs is a sin, and every moment they have spent apart will need to be remade a thousand times over before Hannibal is satisfied.

That night, Hannibal feeds Will until neither of them can take another bite. He shows Will their bed, undresses him with reverent hands, kisses the swell of his belly and purrs when Will spreads his legs. He digs his teeth into Will's neck, savors the sweetness of his blood as it rushes into his mouth, and bares his throat so that Will can re-mark him in turn. Their throats burn, and Hannibal touches Will and draws cry after pleasured cry from his dry lungs until Hannibal is sure that there's nothing in Will's head except for his touch, his scent, his heat.

He mounts Will when Will is so slick, his scent overpowers all else. He kisses and bites new marks onto his nape and shoulders to replace the ones faded. He claws at Will's tender chest, rakes his nails down Will's arms, sucks deep bruises to the side of his throat so that no one would ever doubt that this lovely, beautiful Omega has been claimed.

He fucks Will gently, draws the first orgasm out of him and leaves Will shaking, then rolls Will onto his back to give the same treatment with his mouth to Will's collarbones, his red chest. He draws moans and howls from his mate that are both deafening and so intimately quiet that it feels like each one breaks a new piece of his heart away to be cradled in Will's body. He draws back to kiss and suck marks to Will's thighs, delights in how they shake under his hands, slick and pale only to be marred with deep, dark welts in the shape of his teeth.

He works Will through a second orgasm, drinks the pained moan from his red mouth, kisses him until neither one of them can breathe. Will bites him in turn, eagerly lifting his hands and his heart into Hannibal's care as Hannibal sinks back into him.

When Hannibal knots him, the fire in his head finally cools, and he covers Will with his warmth and strength, pets through Will's hair and licks over his tender neck as Will catches his breath and trembles beneath him.

It's the most decadent satisfaction; he has hunted and caught this killer, brought him to his knees not through cruelty or domination, but because Will delights in giving himself over to Hannibal's darkness. He can hear Will's devotion in the beat of his heart, smell his adoration and taste it in his blood. And when Hannibal cradles his stomach with a gentle touch, Will's love makes him tremble.

"I will never be apart from you again," he vows, kissing the words into Will's neck.

Will smiles, and turns his head to catch Hannibal's mouth. "It's time to create a new legacy, Doctor Lecter," he says.

Hannibal shivers, his hand tightening on Will's stomach, and smiles when Will's hand flattens over his own. He can't wait.

Chapter End Notes

And so ends this (longest Hannibal for me omg) fic! I hope you guys enjoyed the ride half as much as I did, and thank you to everyone who stuck through it with me! Have a great day/night :)

Also, for those curious; my headcanon is that Hannibal and Will move somewhere where there's no extradition laws and they live happily ever after. I wanted to include some Margot/Alana resolution, but in all honesty the only thing I could think of was Alana hell-bent on 'rescuing' Will from Hannibal and that messed up my happy ending. (Sequel? who knows).

Anyway, thank you to everyone who commented/kudos'd/shared this fic! I love you guys <3

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!